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OCTOBER 2006

neatoday

Play to Win!

ELECTION 2006

From the statehouse to the White House, how to make sure your voice is heard.

SEE PAGE 26

THE GOVERNORS
THE GRASSROOTS

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FINANCIAL PRESCRIPTION

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features

COVER 26

ELECTION '06

THE GOVERNORS ★ THE GRASSROOTS

Politics are like the lottery—you gotta play to win. But all it takes to make a difference is just a few minutes. From campaigning for pro-public education governors to cyberlobbying your elected representatives, you can support your students and your schools this fall—even while wearing pjs and slippers.

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No matter how much they love the students, educators need a corner of the school to call their own. Check out these lounges voted "most likely to inspire."

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As school publications struggle with the issues of limited resources and censorship, many students may be losing interest in the power of the press—and their own rights.

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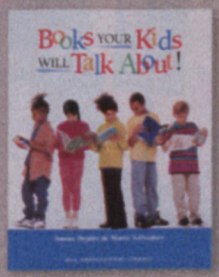

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ESP

All in the Family 20

Robyn Driscoll has both politics and public service in her blood. Meet this adult education program specialist who's also a first-term state rep to the Montana Legislature.

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Chris Gardner went from living on the street to working on Wall Street. He hasn't forgotten the educators who helped him along the way.

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Tired of correcting Bobby's talking during class? Praising his more mannerly neighbor can help him see the light, says one music teacher.

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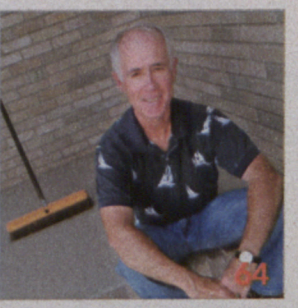
Those ubiquitous rebate offers might seem like a good idea, but many times they're not worth the paper they're printed on. Also—Organic food: Is it worth it?



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ON THE WEB

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Meet the ESPs who drove their hearts out in this safety competition and view their interviews, stats, driving tips, and more.

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ELECTION '06 www.nea.org/vote
Which candidates really support education? Find out online.

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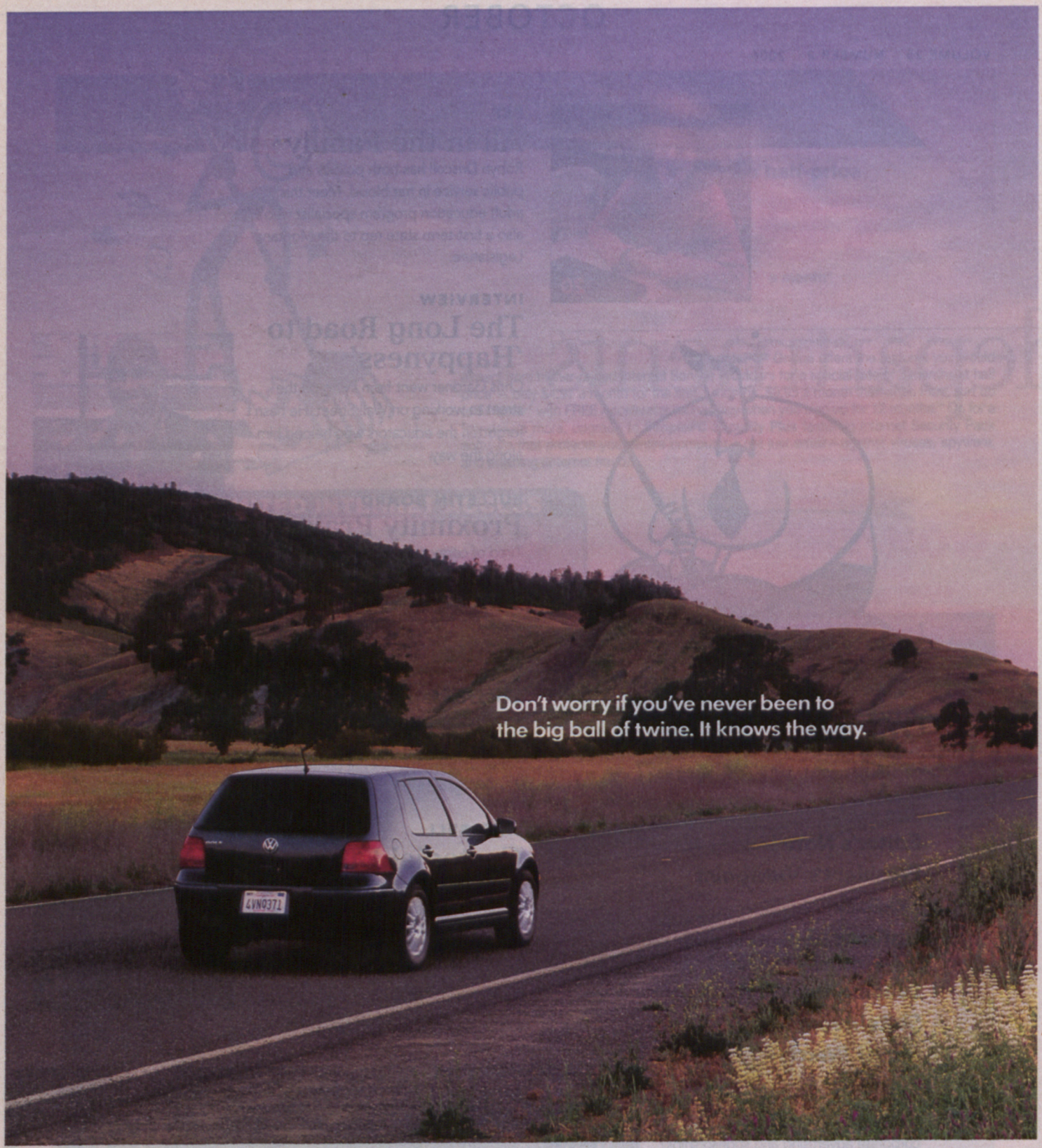

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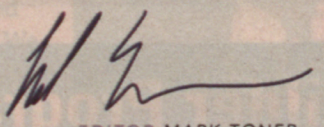
It's Not Just Your Vote That Counts

All politics may not really be local, but local politics rarely is dull. Consider the governor races we profile on page 26. There, you'll find the Amway heir who's bankrolling school voucher efforts across the country, a state official accused of helping tip the scales in the 2004 presidential election, and, of course, a certain California governor whose mixed reviews didn't stop after he quit playing monosyllabic cyborgs on the silver screen. ¶ Local color aside, the issues involved in statehouse races this fall are serious business—attacks on pensions, the ongoing privatization push, and the so-called "65 percent solution" are all on the plate in many states—maybe even yours. ¶ Fear not, though. We know you're busy—really busy—but there are ways to help fight for public education, even if you don't want to leave your house (or get out of your pjs, for that matter). ¶ Send an e-mail. Talk to friends. Host a house party. It's easy, and it pays off. Just ask Colorado teacher Mary Beth Solano, whose story about a child hurt by NCLB went from the Web to the halls of Congress. Or Larry Nelson, who parlayed his years as a middle school teacher to become mayor of his Wisconsin town. Neither needed a family fortune or a film career to make a difference. And neither, it turns out, do you.



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Great Public Schools for Every Child

Why Politics?

To hold elected leaders accountable for great public schools.

As public education advocates, we have a responsibility to make our voices heard on the issues that impact our students, our schools, and our communities. Great public schools for every child is a vision worth fighting for, and achieving this vision requires the highest level of commitment.

We must be prepared to put ourselves on the frontlines and commit to political involvement to ensure a quality education for our students. We are in a powerful position to make great public schools a reality for all children and students, but only to the extent that we elect candidates who support public education and the work that we do.

Some of our colleagues think it is unprofessional of us to climb into the political arena and would rather focus attention solely on their students and schools. While I respect the devotion behind this sentiment, I only wish it were that simple. We choose to ignore politics at our own peril. Education decisions—from those made by local school boards to those made in state capitols and on Capitol Hill—rest in the hands of politicians. We have a professional duty to support our friends who stand up for children and public education, and retire those who stand in the way of continued progress.

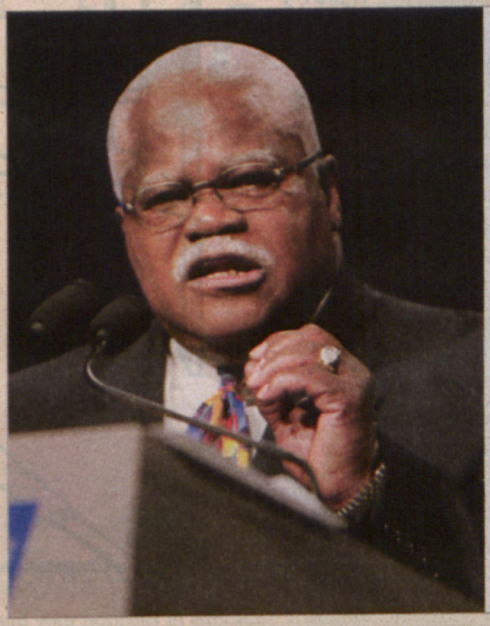
Team NEA, this is what membership is all about! We speak up together for our profession and our students. We bargain together so that we don't have to stand alone. And we work together to elect the candidates who will invest in our schools, colleges, and universities.

Whether we are Democrats, Republicans, or independents, public education is being challenged from every direction. We are battling the worst cuts to federal education funding in a decade, and we have lived with the negative consequences of the so-called No Child Left Behind law for almost five years. From school vouchers to privatization to TABOR and the "65 Percent" plan, our state affiliates are fighting to defend public education from hostile forces.

But friends, now is the time to act. The midterm elections are right around the corner. We have the best chance we've had in years to organize, mobilize, and rally behind the issues that unite us.

Protecting the basic right of every child to a great public school means stepping up as never before and electing leaders who will work with us to close the gaps in student achievement; sustain and expand upon our relationships with ethnic minority communities; improve upon the salary and wages of teachers, education support professionals, and college faculty; realize school funding that is adequate and equitable; and effect meaningful changes during the upcoming reauthorization of No Child Left Behind, the current version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Your leadership and advocacy begin in your schools and classrooms, but they don't end there. Educate your community about the connection between public education and politics. Convince your colleagues that elections do have consequences. And make sure your family and friends are not only registered to vote but actually go to the polls on election day.



"We choose to ignore politics at our own peril. Education decisions...rest in the hands of politicians."

—REG WEAVER

If we stand on the sidelines, we will allow the opponents of public education free reign to undermine our work and dictate our future and the future of our nation. With 3.2 million members, NEA is the largest professional employee organization in the history of this nation! We have a tremendous ability to positively influence public education and a responsibility to make a difference.

In this election, we need for you to actually become involved. We need for you to give it your all by working tirelessly to elect pro-public education candidates. Team NEA, we can make a difference for students and public education. Your help in doing so is critical and will be very much appreciated!

Reg Weaver

NEA PRESIDENT REG WEAVER

PHOTO: RICK RUNION/NEA

THEN AND NOW

Wow! The picture on the cover of your September issue could describe me completely. I started teaching math at Ogallala High School in the fall of 1967. I am starting my 40th year here. I have grandchildren of former students in my classes. I still enjoy teaching and really enjoy the students. I've been asked if I'm retiring, and I always answer the same: "When I don't have fun anymore, I'll retire."

JAMES AYRES
Ogallala, Nebraska

When I began teaching in the '70s, there were 160 teachers in the entire district. Everyone knew everyone. Last year, I was in an elementary building with a staff of 80-plus. We're lucky if we see other staff members if they are not in our immediate "pod" area for days at a time! Also very different is the technology in our schools. I had to learn to use a computer to keep up. Now I wonder what we'd do without it!

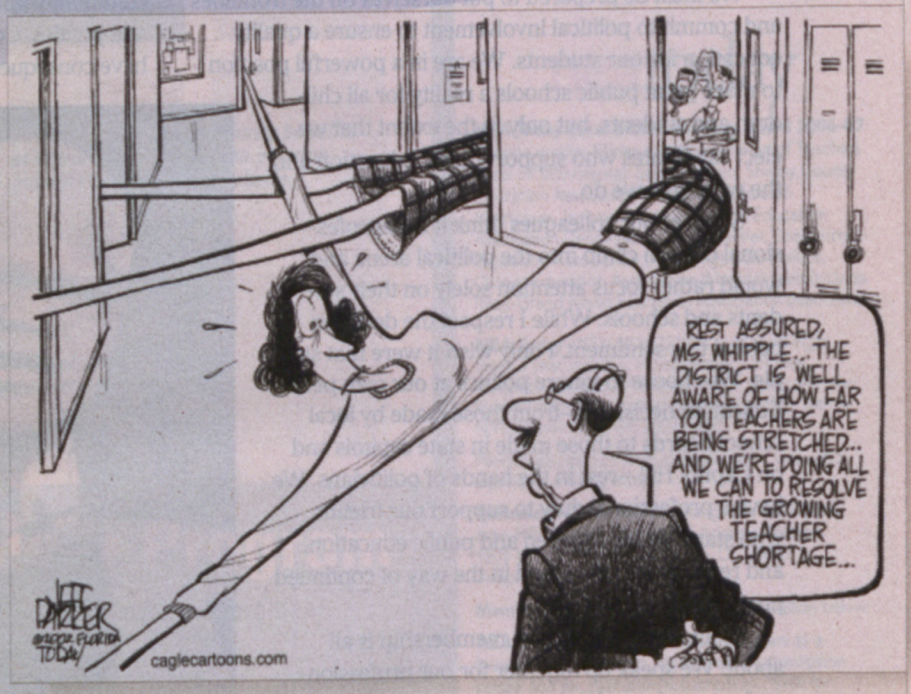
SUSAN BRINK
Pocono Mountain, Pennsylvania

REMOTE CONTROL

I read the article regarding the use of technology as a way to turn teachers into robots ("Last Bell," September). There's a [software] company that caters to teaching style in student management. Its system cross-references individual [test] scores with standard lesson plans and alerts the teacher to students who scored below proficient in certain categories.

By doing this, they would not be controlling the teachers' way of teaching, but instead would be helping them notice problems and maybe spend a little more time on a certain subject. While the administration is not taking the personality out of the classroom, software like this has made life a little easier.

JENNIFER ROADMAN
Mount Pleasant, Pennsylvania


REST ASSURED, MS. WHIPPLE... THE DISTRICT IS WELL AWARE OF HOW FAR YOU TEACHERS ARE BEING STRETCHED... AND WE'RE DOING ALL WE CAN TO RESOLVE THE GROWING TEACHER SHORTAGE...
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CYBER COMMENTARY

HEARD ON THE BOARDS

The Department of Ed decision to end evening high school because too many kids are failing is akin to closing hospital emergency rooms because too many patients die.

—From Edwise (edwize.org)

While it is nice to know that parents consider you to be a "good" teacher...I really think it is more appropriate, when it's possible, to match the learning needs of the students to the teacher's strengths. I really don't think parents really know what a teacher is like unless they are constantly at the school and are able to observe the teacher with the class. Unfortunately, very few parents spend that kind of time in our schools!

—From the nea.org discussion board, in response to a question about whether parents should have a say in deciding which teachers are assigned to their children.

WANT TO WEIGH IN?
Chat with your colleagues on NEA's discussion boards at **www.neatoday.org/talkback.html**.

HUMOR'S NOT HELPING

In your September issue, a cartoon ("Talk Back") really disturbed me. While some may not agree with President Bush's [views], there is no reason for printing a satirical political cartoon in a non-political magazine. I understand that politics play a big role in the decisions of our educational system, but mocking our President is not exactly the most tactful way of asking for the government's support.

It is important to remember that some NEA members are Republicans and wish to show support for our President, especially during a time when our country is ridiculed for its lack of unity. I would like to believe that NEA

is a safe haven for all teachers, not just liberal ones.

SUSAN WIXON
Tucson, Arizona

WELCOME WAGON

Today I received my first issue of *NEA Today* as a member of the New York State United Teachers, and I am very impressed. I love the format of your magazine and the thought-provoking, informational articles, which are just the right length for my busy schedule, as well as the valuable tidbits and tips. I look forward to my next issue!

MEAGHAN MCDERMOTT
Suffolk County, New York

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Following the summer merger between the National Education Association of New York and the New York State United Teachers, NYSUT members began receiving* NEA Today *in September.*

CHANGING FACES

I disagree with the contention in "Schools' Changing Faces" (September) that children deserve educators who look like them. For a school to be successful, teachers must learn to treat all students as if they have equal potential, encourage goals that require a little stretching, and provide help for those who need it, regardless of color.

PETER HIBBARD
Toms River, New Jersey

CORRECTION

A September story, "Playing the Odds," provided an incorrect population figure for Oshkosh, Wisconsin. According to the 2000 Census, it numbered 62,916.

LET'S TALK

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CARTOON: JEFF PARKER

MEMBER IN THE NEWS

"WE TRY TO RECRUIT males, as other school systems do. They are extremely important as role models for male students, especially in the younger grades because of the lack of role models in families."

TALLADEGA, ALABAMA, SUPERINTENDENT LEONARD MESSER
Daily Home, *August 20, 2006.*

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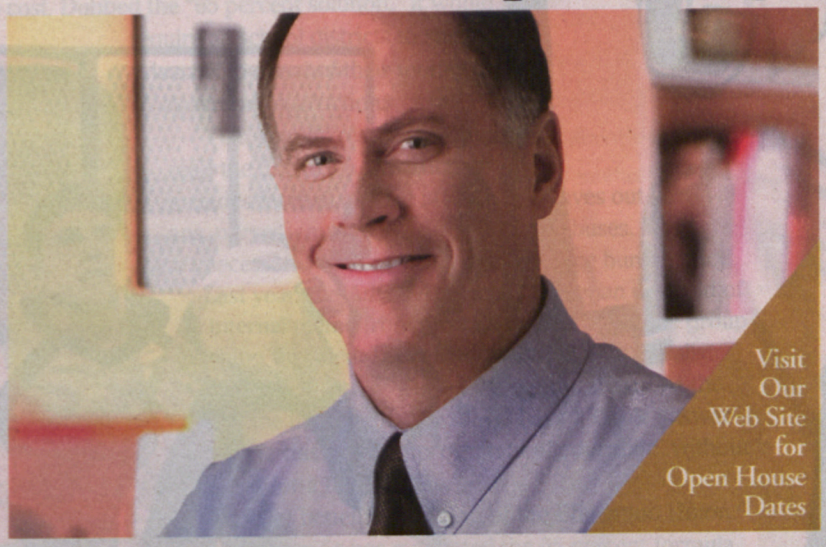

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NUTRITION ISN'T WHAT'S ON THEIR MINDS. BUT WE KNOW IT'S ON YOURS.

We all know the importance of raising healthy children. We also know that parents can't do it alone. That's why we at America's beverage companies are proud to anncunce we're taking a major step to help.

Working together with the Alliance for a Healthier Generation–a joint initiative of the American Heart Association and the William J. Clinton Foundation–we've developed new School Beverage Guidelines, which you'll see in many schools starting this fall.

Under these new guidelines, students will have a broad range of lower-calorie, nutritious, smaller portion beverage choices–100% juice, low-fat milk and bottled water in elementary and middle schools, with the addition of diet sodas, sports drinks and low-calorie teas in high schools.

It's all part of a broader effort to teach children the importance of a balanced diet and exercise. By working together with parents, teachers, and government and health professionals, we hope to help America's current and future schoolchildren grow up healthier than ever.

For more details, visit www.ameribev.org

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Call It 100 Percent Wrong

NEA AND AFT JOIN FORCES AGAINST THE SO-CALLED '65 PERCENT SOLUTION.'

COMING SOON to your state—if it's not there already—is the latest bad idea for improving schools at no cost. Dubbed the "65 percent solution," it would require all school districts to spend at least 65 percent of their money on classroom instruction.

That sounds reasonable until you read the fine print. "Instruction" includes football and ice hockey, but leaves out librarians, nurses, counselors, cafeterias, and buses. So this isn't necessarily about cutting central office bureaucracy.

Last year, the *Austin American-Statesman* got hold of an internal memo from First Class Education, the group pushing this idea. The memo spells out what it calls "The Political Benefits of 1st Class Education." At the top of the list? "Republicans will have a viable answer to 'in the classroom improvement of education' without the need for a tax increase."

The next benefit: "Splitting of the Education Union."

So far, Georgia has mandated the 65 percent formula and Texas has a watered-down version.

NEA and the American Federation of Teachers are working together to defeat 65 percent referenda in Colorado and Oklahoma. It's under consideration in many other states as well, but there are signs the tide may be turning. Many business and community leaders are joining educators in saying this arbitrary budget target has nothing to do with better schools.

Nationally, 61.3 percent of school spending fits the federal definition of "instruction." There is no indication that districts that spend over 65 percent do a better job.

For more on the "65 percent solution" and a link to the secret memo, visit www.nea.org/65percent/65percentresources.html.

13 GET YOUR GRILL ON

14 BIO BUS

16 A STATE SANDWICH?

SCHOOLHOUSE ILLUSTRATION: GETTY IMAGES; PHOTOS—BOOKS, BUS, AND FOOD TRAY: RYAN MCVAY; SPORTS EQUIPMENT: PHOTODISC; PHOTO COLLAGE BY GROFF CREATIVE INC.

An EXTREME Makeover

Teachers and staff returning to Eccleston Elementary in Orlando, Florida, found that someone—make that a lot of someones—had been in their school over the summer. But they certainly didn't mind the intrusion.

FIRST 5 YEARS

NEARLY 300 attendees of NEA's Student Leadership Conference and other pre-Representative Assembly meetings descended on the school in late June to landscape the grounds, and paint, clean, and decorate the building, which needed major improvements.

There was a glamorous addition to the agenda this year: Armed with a $10,000 donation from Volkswagen and labor from quite a few NEA friends, a designer from HGTV's new decorating show *FreeStyle* custom-designed and executed a new look for the staff lounge. Gone are the worn carpeting, and sagging and mismatched furniture. In their place: A zen-like color palette, chic furniture, new appliances, and a layout more conducive to conversation and relaxation.

"It helps you feel like you're respected," says Eccleston teacher Michael Holt, whose students are mostly low-income or at-risk academically. "It just wasn't a very visually happy place," he said, then, with a laugh, added, "Now it's so nice I'm worried the kids aren't going to be paying any attention to me!"

NEA Student, Retired, and Higher Ed members; teachers; and education support professionals worked to make over a Florida school as part of the NEA Student Program's 10th annual Outreach to Teach event.

PHOTOS: PHELAN EBENHACK

Real Winners

After you carefully pick your candidates in November, are you sure the voting machine won't chew up your virtual ballot and spit it out?

VOTING MACHINES that create a paper trail, plus regular audits of the vote tallies, would provide an answer. And NEA, along with the League of Women Voters and the non-partisan Brennan Center for Justice, has joined a growing movement calling for both.

Advocates point out it doesn't take a nefarious plot for a voting machine to put the wrong person in office—a software glitch will do. And yet, the consequences could be very bad indeed.

With that in mind, following bipartisan support at July's Representative Assembly, NEA President Reg Weaver has written to officials in every state urging them to ensure a paper trail in all elections and also audit 3 to 5 percent of the votes. You can do the same. Read Weaver's letter at www.nea.org/lac/votingrights/0706ltr.html. Then back him up with a call to your own state's top election official.

1 **[STATISTIC]**
The percentage of **AMERICANS** who say they'd be more likely to **VOTE** for a candidate who promised to fully fund NCLB.

SOURCE: NATIONAL SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

The ice is melting, baby

FOR STUDENTS in several North Texas school districts, it might be time to turn off the heat. Mouth jewelry—called grills or "grillz"—has been banned from school. Too distracting, school officials say. But in the textbooks of Texas rap artists, this is the look to learn: "My mouth is similar to a disco ball," raps Paul Wall, a national hit artist (who also claims to brush with Windex?!) "It got gold grills and platinum and ice, cause that's how it is in the Lone Star State."

Notepad

The Gift of Giving

A retired Illinois elementary teacher has bestowed one of the largest individual gifts in the NEA Foundation's history. Nancy Buckles, 72, a teacher in the Homewood School District for 37 years, died this year, but directed in her will that $92,000 be used in the advancement of public education.

With her bequest, Buckles has ensured that her passions will be supported in perpetuity, said Foundation President Louis Lower, CEO of the Horace Mann Companies.

For more information about the Foundation's work, including its grants to educators, or about making a donation, go to www.neafoundation.org.

Fix and Fund

As lawmakers get ready to tackle reauthorization of No Child Left Behind and other elements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act next year, NEA and its members are ready to steer them in the right direction. Check out NEA's Positive Agenda for the ESEA Reauthorization, a 34-page document that sets out seven criteria necessary for great public schools, and then shoot an e-mail to your members of Congress asking for their support, too. To read (and write), go to www.nea.org/lac/esea.

Have a great idea?

> Send it by mail:
NEA Today
1201 16th St., N.W.,
Washington, DC 20036

> Send it by e-mail:
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PHOTO: MIKE SIMONS; MOUTH ILLUSTRATION: VICKY RABINOWICZ, ART ASSEMBLY BY GROFF CREATIVE INC.

Fuel from the Midwest, Not the Mideast

MMMM, THE SMELL OF CHICKEN ON THE GRIDDLE, POTATOES IN THE FRYER, AND THE SCHOOL BUS ON THE ROAD...

WHAT'S THAT? More and more school bus drivers are discovering that "biodiesel" runs any diesel engine, burns cleaner than fossil fuels, is cost effective—and smells pretty good.

Last year, Darla Smith's chemistry class at Bedford North Lawrence High School in Indiana whipped up a batch of the environmentally friendly fuel. Their recipe calls for vegetable oil—"We don't call it 'soybean oil,' because they would shorten it to 'soil,'" quips Smith—and a $415 kit from the Indiana Soybean Board (www.soybeansciencekit.com). Today, based on their results, all buses in their district run on a B20 blend (20 percent biodiesel and 80 percent petroleum), joining a trend that started in the late 1990s in Medford, New Jersey.

At that time, Terri Palmer-Shover drove the first experimental biodiesel school bus. Now, she no longer suffers headaches just from showing up to work. "The smell before would burn your sinuses," she says. "Now, it smells like you're cooking food."

Burn the bean, baby.

—REBECCA L. WEBER

85

GOING ONCE...

FAT TUESDAY IN TEXAS

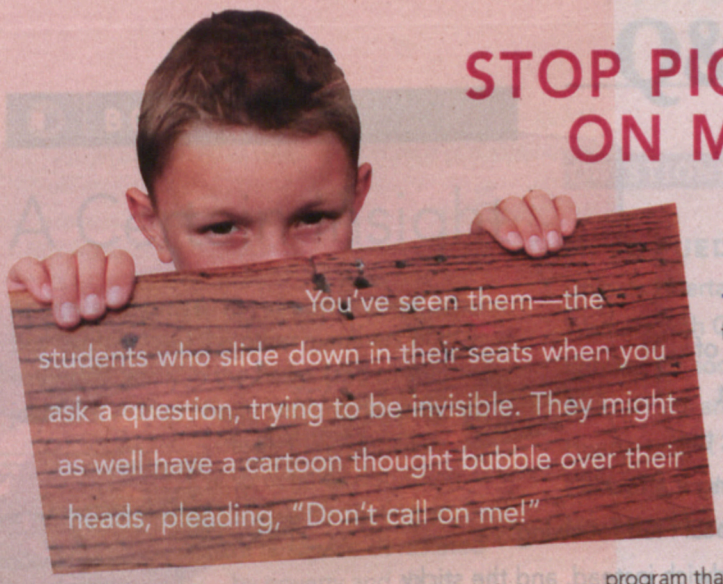
No one's surprised to hear of bidding wars over the likes of Roger Clemens and Shaquille O'Neal...but over teachers? Is this a dream? (If it is, don't wake us up.)

IN TEXAS, as the state provides more money to school districts this year and a shortage of qualified teachers persists, starting salaries are flying out of the park. In one Dallas-area district, teachers will start at $44,159. Nearby, other districts say they have no choice but to match. "Will we stay competitive? Absolutely," one spokesman told *The Dallas Morning News*.

At least one-third of Texas teachers, and probably more, will earn more than $40,000 this year. (That's the minimum all teachers should make, NEA says.) But there is at least one big strike in this game. Remember our star rookie earning $44,159? After five years, he gets a not-so-whopping raise to $45,559. And after 10 years? Just $46,961.

BUS PHOTO: STEPHEN SIMPSON; CORN PHOTO: JOHN FOXX; TEACHER PHOTO: CORBIS, PHOTO COLLAGE BY GROFF CREATIVE INC.

STOP PICKING ON ME!



You've seen them—the students who slide down in their seats when you ask a question, trying to be invisible. They might as well have a cartoon thought bubble over their heads, pleading, "Don't call on me!"

THANKS to research by former high school math teacher Paige Allison, those students may have to come out of hiding.

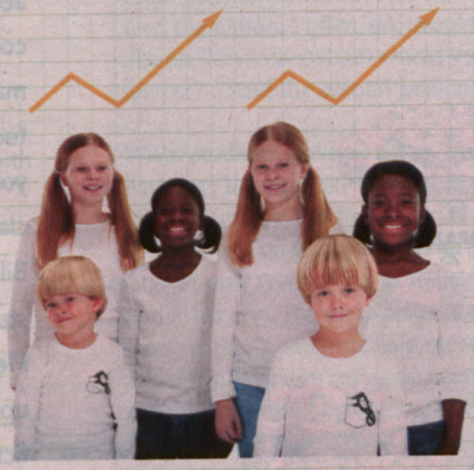
Allison found that when teachers use handheld computers running a Microsoft Excel program that randomly chooses names, students know everyone's fair game, and they become more engaged in lessons. Plus, teachers were more likely to call on an equal number of girls, boys, and minorities.

Allison, now an anthropologist specializing in issues of gender and ethnicity in math education, asked a programmer to create the program for her research. "The next step is to implement the study on a larger scale, and part of that is software development," she said. In the meantime, try a quick, low-tech option—a cup of Popsicle sticks labeled with your students' names.

[STATISTIC]

The percentage of Americans who believe **CONGRESS** is **CHEATING CHILDREN** when it doesn't fully fund educational programs.

SOURCE: NATIONAL SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION



You knew it all along!

A NEW STUDY, released by the U.S. Department of Education with remarkably little fanfare, shows that students in public schools—your kids, that is—do just as well or better than private-school students.

The report, done by the Educational Testing Service, looked at reading and math scores from 2003 and compared students of similar racial, economic, and social backgrounds. In math, public school fourth-graders were nearly half a year ahead of comparable students in private schools.

The study also looked at different kinds of private schools—kids in conservative Christian schools did worst, while those in Lutheran schools did best. In eighth-grade math, children in Lutheran schools did better than public school students.

The Department released the study on a hot summer Friday afternoon—no press conference, no glowing statement. Indeed, a spokesman said he didn't expect the study to influence policy. But NEA President Reg Weaver said the findings show public schools "doing an outstanding job."

Global Takes

Afghani Troubles

In Afghanistan, more than 120 schools have been set ablaze and another 200 forced to close by Islamic extremist groups during the past six months, according to the Afghan education ministry. Forty students and teachers also have been killed this year. The insurgents claim educating girls is anti-Islam, and they also oppose government-funded schools for boys because they teach subjects other than religion. But one 14-year-old boy told the Associated Press what he thinks is the real reason: "They [the Taliban] want us illiterate so we have nothing else to do but pick up a gun."

Tear Gas and Teachers

Striking Mexican teachers, protesting over poor pay, clashed with police at a rally this summer that sent dozens of teachers to the hospital. The strike, organized by Section 22 of the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación, an affiliate of Education International, has closed all Oaxaca schools and blocked roads and hotel entrances. The state government has said it doesn't have the money to raise pay. NEA has denounced the government-ordered violence against teachers, called for the investigation and prosecution of those responsible, and also sent $10,000 to help with medical bills.

Have a great idea?

> Send it by mail:
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1201 16th St., N.W.,
Washington, DC 20036

> Send it by e-mail:
neatoday@nea.org

BOY PHOTO: STOCKBYTE; KIDS PHOTO: JAMES WOODSON

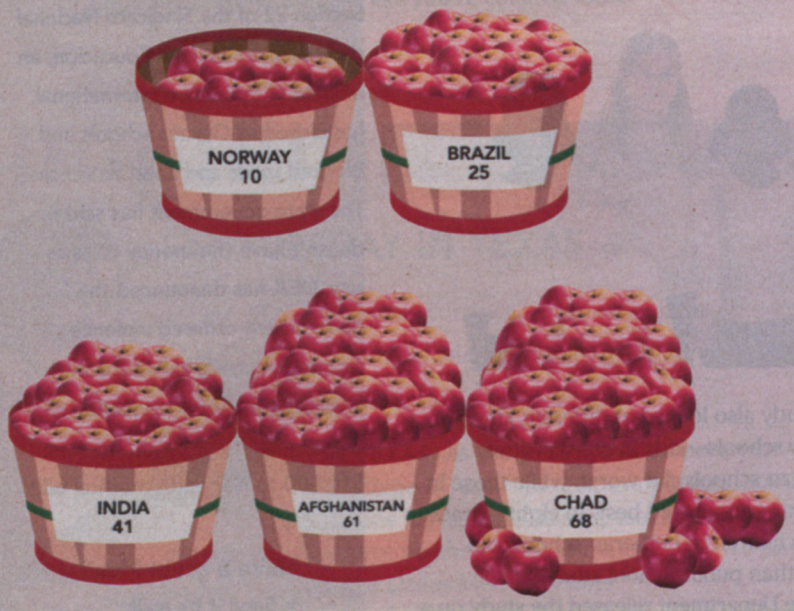
Political Fluff

WHEN MASSACHUSETTS STATE SENATOR Jarrett Barrios (D) found out his son was eating Fluffernutters—a favorite New England combination of peanut butter and marshmallow spread—for lunch at school, he proposed a junk-food bill to severely limit the gooey spread. "I'm not sure we should be even calling it a food!" he said. But Barrios had sorely underestimated the local Fluff following. Defiant lawmakers proposed making it the state sandwich instead, and the sticky controversy dominated regional news—that is, until Barrios withdrew his bill and refrained from uttering the F-word again.

VITAL STATS

THAT'S A LOT OF APPLES...

On World Teachers' Day, October 5, count the number of kids in your classroom and compare it to **AVERAGE PRIMARY-SCHOOL ENROLLMENT** around the world:



SOURCE: UNESCO, 2003

SCHOLARLY SHOWDOWN

ARE WE LOSING OUR EDGE?

We've heard a lot about American competitiveness in math, science, and technology, but not from you! What's happening in your classroom? Are you training the next Bill Gates? (Or do you think he's studying somewhere in China?) Please help *NEA Today* with an upcoming story on the fact and fiction of global competitiveness—e-mail your thoughts and ideas to clong@nea.org.

"The question is: How successful can an

SANDWICH PHOTO: GROFF CREATIVE INC.; BUSHELS OF APPLES: GROFF CREATIVE INC.; ILLUSTRATION: TODD DAVIDSON

BOOK FOCUS

A Certain Insight

AFTER SPENDING 10 years with Coco, Jessica, Boy George, and the other members of their extended family in the Bronx (and prison), journalist Adrian Nicole LeBlanc has put together a detailed, sometimes disturbing, always fascinating account of family life devastated by poverty and drugs. It's called *Random Family* (Scribner), and it spent a little time on bestseller lists this summer. You know these kids—you have them in your classrooms, cafeterias, and school buses—but do you know enough about their lives after the last bell? Much of it is heartbreaking, like this development in a 5-year-old's life: "In the meantime, Mercedes had continued to complain about her toothaches, and she was still taking lots of baths; Coco brought her to the clinic. The dentist said that five of her teeth were rotten and needed to be removed; the doctor diagnosed Mercedes with genital warts....Coco was devastated. Suddenly, this doctor was saying that her daughter might have been molested."

[STATISTIC]

The percentage of AMERICANS who say Congress should RESTORE FUNDING for NCLB and special education.

SOURCE: NATIONAL SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

Q&A

QUESTIONS FOR Dolores Huerta

SÍ, SE PUEDE

Dolores Huerta founded the United Farm Workers with César Chávez. At 76, she's still fighting for social justice, leading a foundation that recruits and trains community organizers. Huerta taught elementary school in Stockton, California, in the 1950s. Her daughter teaches third grade in Los Angeles. Huerta talked recently with *NEA Today*'s Alain Jehlen.

What do educators need to understand to help farm workers' children learn?

Answer: They need to understand that these children are very intelligent, even though they don't speak English. If you don't speak Spanish, you need to get an assistant who does.

It's very difficult now for Latino children who don't speak English in California and other states that have eliminated bilingual education. The children will learn English eventually, but if they are made to feel guilty for speaking Spanish, that leaves a terrible mark that's very hard to get over.

How can we help them gain confidence and learn?

Answer: They shouldn't be made to feel inferior. They should be proud of their parents. Farm workers do the most important work in the world: they feed the nation. I often ask people, if you had to be on a deserted island—like on *Survivor*—whom would you take with you, a farm worker or a lawyer?....And the second person I would take would be a teacher.

When students move so often, how can a teacher connect?

Answer: In states like California where farm workers can get unemployment insurance, the family can stay after the harvest is over and the children can go to school....Education is so important. You know, César Chávez only went as far as the eighth grade, but he always had a book under his arm. He was always learning and always promoting education. A farm worker's daughter told me that when she was a girl, her father went to a Farm Workers rally and heard César say, "Your children need to go to school. They don't belong in the fields, take them out." The next day, her father sent all his children to school. Today, that daughter is a community college president.

For teaching materials on United Farm Workers organizing drives among migrant workers, go to www.chavezfoundation.org/.

education law be that makes teachers the enemy?"

—Columnist Michael Winerip, *The New York Times*, July 12, 2006

HUERTA PHOTO: C. LOPEZ

NCLB, Take Two

The law expires next year. What will replace it?

Change is in the air for the so-called "No Child Left Behind" law (NCLB), the current incarnation of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

NCLB comes up for renewal or reform next fall. NEA has hammered out a list of essential reforms called NEA's Positive Agenda for ESEA Reauthorization and a plan to get these reforms into the law, which was approved at last summer's Representative Assembly.

NEA Executive Committee member Becky Pringle, chair of NEA's ESEA Advisory Committee, has been promoting that agenda at formal and informal meetings with movers and shakers around the country. Most recently, she testified at a meeting of an influential, nonpartisan commission created by the Aspen Institute to consider changes to NCLB.

Pringle told the commission that NEA supports some elements of NCLB. One example, she said, is the requirement that student test scores be reported separately by race, ethnicity, income level, and other categories as a way to identify achievement gaps. But merely acknowledging the gaps without providing the resources and support to address them means kids and schools are unfairly labeled and the underlying problems are not being addressed.

NEA Executive Committee member **Becky Pringle** tells the Aspen Institute's NCLB commission how NCLB needs to change.

"TEACHING what is most easily tested may be convenient and cheaper in the short run, but in the long run, will threaten our ability to compete globally." —BECKY PRINGLE, NEA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

And, she said, the law's extreme concentration on test scores as the sole measure of a school's success is making things worse.

Business leaders and educators agree, she noted, that "teaching what is most easily tested may be convenient and cheaper in the short run, but in the long run, will threaten our ability to compete globally."

Overreliance on high-stakes standardized tests dampens the enthusiasm for teaching and learning, Pringle said, and will not promote the 21st-century skills our students need.

Pringle says more education leaders and policymakers are paying attention to the problems with NCLB and to NEA's proposals.

"They're listening to us because our agenda makes sense and because the status quo is just not working," Pringle says. "The one-size-fits-all, test-and-punish provisions of NCLB have not done the job. We now have solid data. Reading scores nationwide are essentially flat. Math scores are rising, which is good, but they're rising more slowly than they were before NCLB.

"The bottom line: NCLB in its current form is not helping kids learn. The Administration likes to say that everything we do should be research-based. NCLB fails that test."

The ESEA Advisory Committee, appointed by NEA President Reg Weaver, gathered input from educators around the country last spring and crafted NEA's Positive Agenda.

That agenda includes some well-established building blocks for great public schools that can help close achievement gaps—building blocks like small classes and a rich, rigorous, and comprehensive curriculum that gives all students the knowledge and critical thinking skills they need to succeed in the modern job market.

The NEA agenda also calls for schools to be held accountable on the basis of multiple measures of success, not just one-size-fits-all test scores.

And it asks Congress and the President to provide the resources needed to ensure there are quality educators in each classroom, programs to engage parents in helping their children learn, and the money needed to make all that happen.

To get these changes incorporated into the next version of the federal law, NEA is building alliances with other pro-public education organizations—88 groups so far and still growing. NEA is also mobilizing educators on the front lines to tell their stories to the decision-makers in Congress.

Pringle says there's urgent work to be done right now. Although the law doesn't come up for renewal until next year, she says the success of the reform effort could be determined this fall at the ballot box, when one-third of the U.S. senators and all House of Representatives members will be elected.

"Many of them have tight races," Pringle says. "In these races, educators' votes could put a pro-public school candidate into office, ready to make common sense reforms when NCLB comes up next year."

For information on the candidates in your state, go to your state Association Web site. You can contact your member of Congress and ask him or her to support NEA's reform proposals at www.nea.org/lac. To tell your NCLB story, and to learn more about the law and the ESEA Committee report, visit www.nea.org/esea.

—ALAIN JEHLEN

PHOTO: SANDY SCHAEFFER

65 Percent Delusion

OKLAHOMA The push for the so-called "65-percent solution," now active in at least 18 states and the District of Columbia, has moved to Oklahoma. Supporters of an initiative to keep at least 65 percent of public school money in the classroom submitted enough signatures on petitions to advance the proposal to the state's Supreme Court. The Secretary of State's office has completed its count of the signatures gathered for the proposal, which may appear next month on Oklahoma ballots. **The Oklahoma Education Association (OEA)** is challenging the proposal, according to OEA President Roy Bishop.

"The 65 percent idea would do so much harm to our schools," he says, "and the average person may not ever realize what this proposal would do until it's too late." Opponents call the initiative deceptive because it implies that budget savings would be achieved by cutting administrative costs (see "Call It 100 Percent Wrong," page 10).

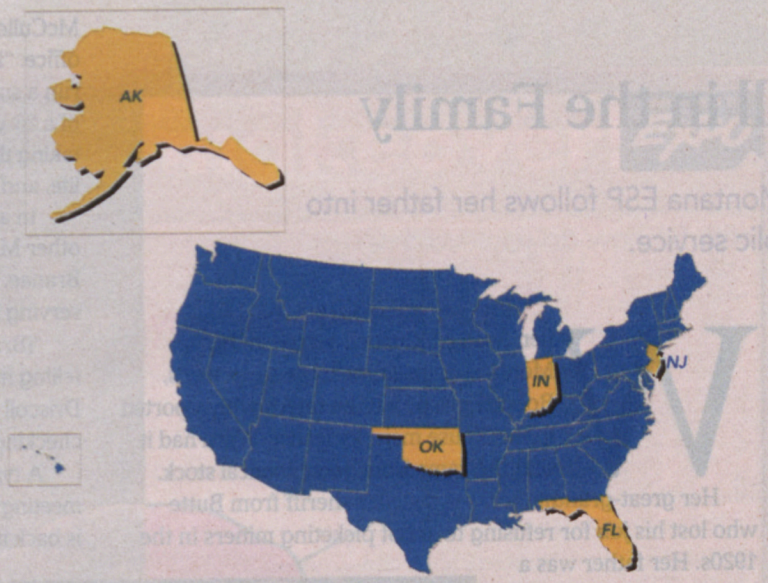
The petition states that teacher salaries, school supplies, special education programs, computers, libraries and librarians, field trips, athletics, art, and extracurricular activities would be considered classroom expenses. These expenses do not include transportation, cafeteria, utility, maintenance, and administrative costs; nursing; and counseling services. More information is available at www.okea.org.

Teachers, ESPs Fight Outsourcing

ALASKA After the Mat-Su Borough School Board voted to privatize custodial services last July, the **Classified Employees Association (CEA)** and **NEA-Alaska** filed a grievance challenging the proposal. Teachers belonging to the **Mat-Su Education Association (MSEA)** joined education support professionals (ESPs) in their fight, saying that custodians are a valuable part of the education team whose loyalty and service would be lost if a private contractor were hired.

Replacing low-paid jobs that offer benefits with lower-paying jobs without benefits would damage the Valley's economy, said CEA President Ron Rucker.

Outsourcing would also strain public services such as health care when the uninsured contract workers or their families get sick, Rucker added. Soon after, Rucker and CEA's vice president and treasurer were laid off. This action prompted charges that school district officials targeted the leaders to stifle further debate on the issue. For more on the situation, visit www.neaalaska.org.



Pledge Campaign

FLORIDA **The Florida Education Association (FEA)** has discovered a new way to define its agenda and create higher visibility for public schools. It's called the I Pledge Campaign, and organizers hope to collect more than 1 million signatures demanding change, particularly in four areas: smaller class sizes, improved school funding, support for schools in need (in lieu of vouchers), and competitive wages for teachers and ESPs.

FEA kicked off the campaign in June. For more information, see www.feaweb.org.

Sound Strategy Pays Off

INDIANA East Allen's school board ended its 30-year tradition of collective bargaining with its predominantly female groups of ESPs. Efforts to reverse the decision went nowhere, as did a gender discrimination complaint with the Human Rights Commission.

"It certainly hurt morale," said Wendy Walker, a school nurse and **Indiana State Teachers Association (ISTA)** ESP of the Year. Like her father and children, and many other East Allen ESPs, Walker graduated from the local high school. "Collective bargaining is huge job security for all of our people," she said. ESPs formed a PAC, marched in parades, questioned candidates in open forums, met with reporters, and identified candidates for school board seats up for election in May. The intense efforts paid off with landslide victories at the polls for bargaining-friendly candidates.

Quick and Cool Settlement

NEW JERSEY Members of the **Egg Harbor Township Education Association (EHTEA)** held their first negotiations meeting with school board members a full year before their contract was to expire this summer.

"I don't want to see us in the newspaper," President Kathy Waszen told members. "Let's work to get a fair and timely settlement."

The school board apparently agreed, and by January had signed a successor agreement through June 2009. Not only were health benefits protected, but the contract also included an overall 5 percent increase in each year of the agreement. By the 2008–09 school year, EHTEA's first salary step for teachers will be $45,500.

IMAGE: PHOTODISC; IMAGE CONSTRUCTION: GROFF CREATIVE INC.

All in the Family

A Montana ESP follows her father into public service.

When Scott McCulloch served in the Montana Legislature in the early 1990s, Robyn Driscoll was an intern who reported to the House majority leader. Word had it that she came from good political stock.

Her great-grandfather was a stellar sheriff from Butte who lost his job for refusing to shoot picketing miners in the 1920s. Her father was a hard-core union man who worked for an oil refinery in Billings. As a Democratic precinct committee member, he registered voters, attended campaign rallies, and drove neighbors to the polls. Young Robyn was always nearby.

Later, as an intern, "you'd see her on the assembly floor, at fundraisers, committee meetings...everywhere," says McCulloch, a field consultant with MEA-MFT who served two terms in the legislature.

State Rep. **Robyn Driscoll** sits on the Insurance Committee of the Billings Classified Employees Association. Next month, she runs for a second term in the Montana legislature.

Today, Driscoll is still a presence at state political events, though no longer as an intern from Rocky Mountain College. In keeping with the family tradition of public service, Driscoll is the first-term state representative from House District 51 in Billings.

Since the Montana Legislature convenes only in odd-numbered years, most legislators have other, full-time jobs. Driscoll is an adult education program specialist with the Billings school district. The district's union contract allows her to take unpaid leave when the legislature is in session from January to April.

Elected in November 2004, Driscoll is up for re-election this fall. She credits her internship and family background as the building blocks of her political career. "Political conversations were abundant at the dinner table," she says. "I knew after completing my internship that I would run someday."

There are five children in the Driscoll family, all of whom work on the campaigns of Democratic candidates. But it was McCulloch who approached Driscoll in 2002 about running for office. "I didn't feel ready at the time to do the work required to run a successful campaign," says Driscoll, a 44-year-old mother of a 26-year-old daughter. So she waited two years before taking the plunge. "Campaigning completely takes over your life, and that's before you even take office," she says.

In addition to family support, Driscoll can count on 14 other MEA-MFT members serving in the statehouse. Gary Branae, a retired high school math teacher and counselor, is serving his third term as a state representative.

"[Branae] graciously advises me on everything, including telling me when I need to take a deep breath and regroup," Driscoll says. "There isn't much politically that I do without checking with him first."

A typical day at the statehouse finds Driscoll in a committee meeting by 8 a.m. She reports to the House floor at 1 p.m., then is back in committee meetings through the afternoon. During mid-session, when bills are transmitted to the Senate, Driscoll's days start at 6 a.m. and stretch into the night.

"I am usually so tired when I leave the office, about the best I can do is eat a quick meal and read through the next day's bills before falling asleep," she says.

Despite her long hours as a policymaker, Driscoll can't seem to leave her school duties behind.

"Part of my job with the district is producing a brochure of classes," she says. "I didn't want anyone else working on that, so my boss lets me do that from Helena, via e-mail."

Her two worlds also collide far from the statehouse, back home in Billings. When she finishes her school district duties at 5 p.m., Driscoll says she likes to walk the streets knocking on doors until evening.

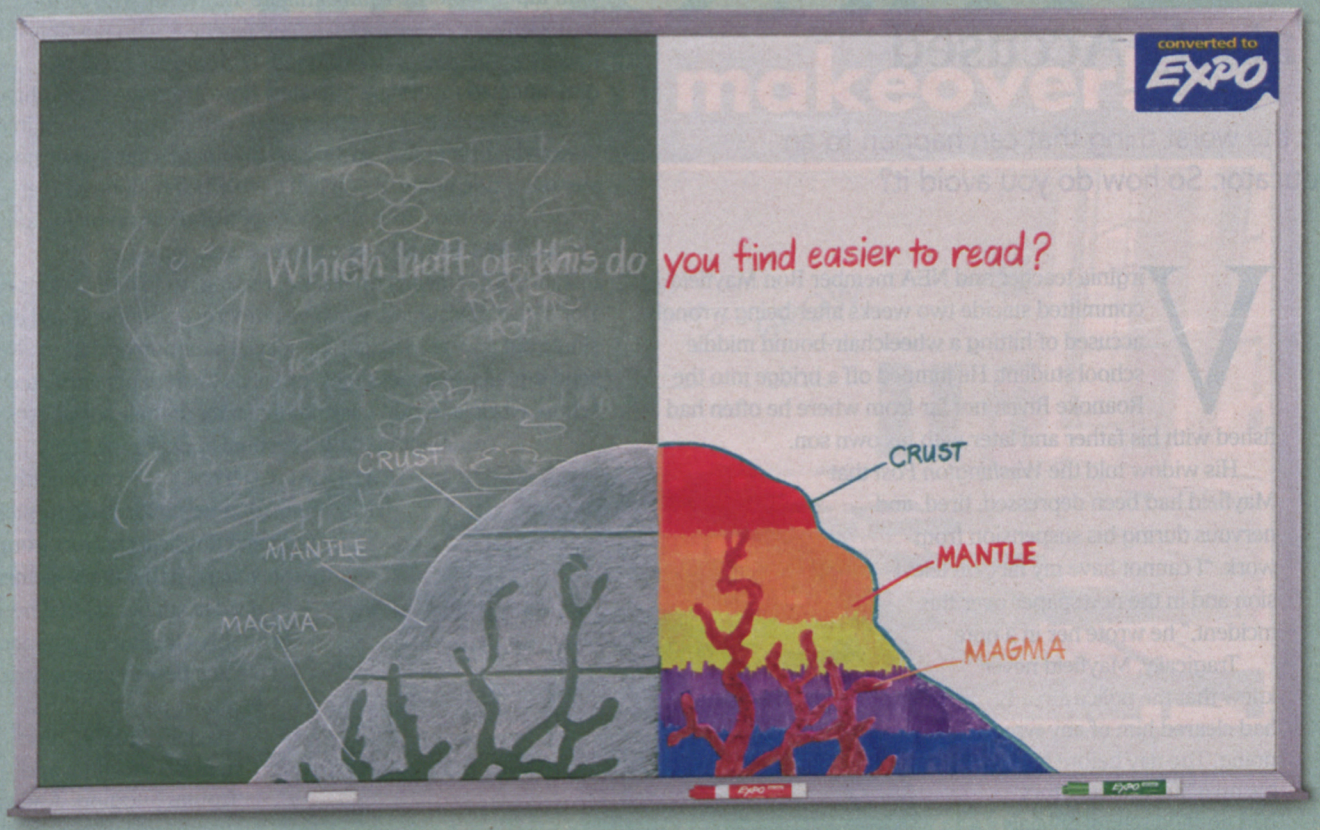
"The best part of being a legislator is meeting folks," she says. "I also like having a voice in things that will affect people's lives."

—JOHN ROSALES

More ESP stories in this issue:

- **Alternative fuels for school buses** – *Page 14*
- **Teachers and ESPs fight privatization in Alaska** – *Page 19*
- **Bus drivers victorious—2006 Roadeo results** – *Page 32*
- **Walking a mile in a custodian's shoes** – *Page 64*

PHOTO: GEORGE LANE



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EXPO®

Falsely Accused

It's the worst thing that can happen to an educator. So how do you avoid it?

Virginia teacher and NEA member Ron Mayfield Jr. committed suicide two weeks after being wrongly accused of hitting a wheelchair-bound middle school student. He jumped off a bridge into the Roanoke River, not far from where he often had fished with his father and later with his own son.

His widow told the *Washington Post* that Mayfield had been depressed, tired, and nervous during his suspension from work. "I cannot have my face on television and in the newspaper over this incident," he wrote her in a note.

Tragically, Mayfield never knew that the police already had cleared him of any wrongdoing. The day before he took his own life, investigators had notified school officials that there was no evidence to substantiate the charge and that the case had been closed. Nobody bothered to call the falsely accused teacher.

While teacher suicides are relatively rare, false allegations are not. And even if the charges are proved false and the teacher is vindicated, the harm already has been done.

Greg Lawler, an attorney with the Colorado Education Association, has written a book, *Guilty Until Proven Innocent*, which documents how false allegations can ruin careers and lives.

"Whenever there is an allegation, there is a victim, whether it is the accused or the accuser," Lawler says. "Students these days know all too well the consequences of an abuse complaint, and they know how to game the system," he warns. "They know how to get an unpopular teacher fired by making false allegations, and unfortunately, some of them try to do just that."

Because the stakes are so high, the NEA Representative Assembly voted last year to produce a pamphlet specifically for new educators that provides common-sense advice on how to avoid false allegations of inappropriate behavior with students.

Entitled *Teach But Don't Touch*, the pamphlet was produced with input from NEA state affiliate attorneys, who all too frequently are called on to defend teachers who possibly could have avoided bogus accusations. The pamphlet will be disseminated to all state affiliates. Here are some highlights:

IF POSSIBLE, NEVER be alone with a student—not in a classroom or a house, and especially not in a car. Never give a student a ride home. If you can't avoid being alone with a student at school, keep the door open and stay in plain sight.

ALWAYS MAINTAIN a professional demeanor and distance. That means no flirting, teasing, or joking about sex. Don't give gifts, unless you give one to every student, and don't single out any one student for special attention or flattery. Never send e-mails, text messages, or cards to students unrelated to school work, and don't ask students about their social lives or comment on their personal appearance.

PHYSICAL CONTACT is a particularly tricky area. Younger children often seek out and need physical comfort from their teachers. In the early elementary grades, an occasional hug is probably OK. But as a general rule, it's best to avoid most forms of physical contact, especially kissing, hair stroking, tickling, and frontal hugging. And use common sense: a "high five" to acknowledge a job well done is fine; a slap on the bottom is not.

NIP CRUSHES in the bud; never allow a student to obsess over you. While crushes can be flattering, they also can be fatal. An unfulfilled fantasy can result in a student acting out to gain attention or retaliating for being ignored.

IF A STUDENT expresses a love interest, respond with an unambiguous "no." Don't equivocate and certainly don't encourage the student by acting pleased by the attention. It's also advisable to share this information with another adult and your union representative. In some circumstances, it may be appropriate to tell your supervisor and ask that the student be transferred.

But even if you follow this advice, there's no guarantee that you won't be the victim of unfounded charges. If the unthinkable happens, remember this: Never give an oral or written statement to school officials without first consulting with your union representative. Even innocent statements can be misconstrued.

—MICHAEL D. SIMPSON
NEA OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL

ILLUSTRATION: CAROL BENIOFF

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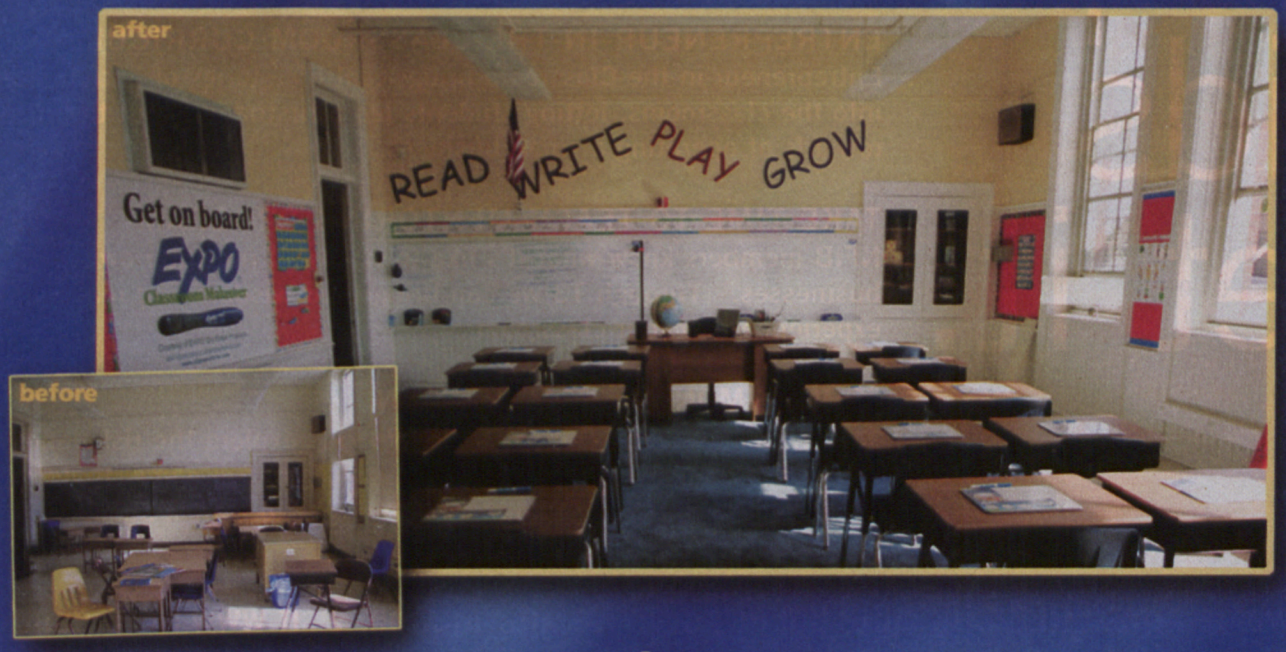

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The Contest is open to students in grades 3 through 12 who are legal residents of the 50 United States or D.C. Void elsewhere and wherever prohibited. To enter, visit www.expomarkers.com. Entry begins 12:00:00 am ET on 6/2/06 and all entries must be received by 11:59:59 pm ET on 12/31/06. The object of the Contest is to write an original essay of 100 words or less in English that describes why one of your teachers deserves a classroom makeover. Entries will be first judged within the following age categories – (a) third grade through fifth grade; (b) sixth grade through eighth grade; (c) ninth grade through twelfth grade – on the basis of the following criteria: Content of essay (what your teacher did to deserve a classroom makeover) (40%); emotional value (30%); and creativity (30%). In the event of ties in any round, the entries involved will be re-judged by a different judge who will serve as the tiebreaker. If you are under 13 years of age, you will be required to provide verifiable parental consent in order to win a prize. Details will be provided at time of prize notification. Limit one entry per person. A maximum of 250 entries will be selected by the judges as "First Prize winners." The three (3) top-ranking entries in each grade group from among the First Prize winners will be declared "Semi-Finalists." All Semi-Finalists' entries will be posted online at www.expomarkers.com. The Semi-Finalist essays will again be judged according to the criteria listed above by qualified judges who were not involved in the First Prize judging. The top scoring essay from among the Semi-Finalist entries shall become the Grand Prize Winner. The second and third scoring essays from among the Semi-Finalist entries will be recognized as Finalists and receive the prize for Finalists described below. Up to 250 First Prizes: Five-Hundred dollars cash ($500.00) or a $500 United States Series I Savings Bond and one (1) classroom makeover valued at $1,000 will be awarded per winner. Nine (9) Semi-Finalist Prizes: All Semi-Finalists will receive the First Prize package as listed above and an additional $100.00 Series I Savings Bond. Two (2) Finalist Prizes: Both Finalists will receive the First Prize and Semi-Finalists prize packages as listed above and an additional $250.00 Series I Savings Bond. One (1) Grand Prize: (A) The Grand Prize winner's school will receive: Sanford writing and marking instruments and Newell Rubbermaid products plus other items that may be used to improve the appearance, structure or curriculum of the winner's teacher's classroom and the winner's school. The total approximate retail value of this portion of the Grand Prize will not exceed $25,000. (B) The Grand Prize winner will receive: a $1,000 Series I Savings Bond for him/herself (in addition to the Series I Bonds received as a First Prize winner and Semi-Finalist.) Total maximum value of all prizes in this contest: $402,400.00
Contest is subject to the complete Official Rules, which may be found at www.expomarkers.com. Sponsor: Sanford, L.P., 2707 Butterfield Rd., Oakbrook, IL 60523

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YOUNG ENTREPRENEUR FOUNDATION

INTRODUCING AMERICA'S YOUTH TO THE IMPORTANCE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The Long Road to 'Happyness'

From living on the street to working on Wall Street, Chris Gardner's transformation illustrates the importance of putting passion in your work.

Anyone who opens Chris Gardner's gripping—and gritty—new autobiography, The Pursuit of Happyness *(HarperCollins), will discover that the happiness he pursues is not just his own.* Happyness, *a title inspired by a sign in the daycare center where Gardner yearns to place his son, chronicles his extraordinary life journey from poverty to prosperity. Pushing his son's stroller with one hand, while balancing a box of Pampers and all his possessions with the other, the homeless single father worked his way from counting cracks on the sidewalk to counting cash on Wall Street. Today, he owns a multimillion-dollar brokerage firm that gives 10 percent of its earnings to support public schools and educators. The longtime NEA supporter recently spoke with* NEA Today's *Sabrina Holcomb about his life and the news that his book will soon be released as a film starring Will Smith.*

Chris Gardner appreciates the teachers who looked out for him and "turned the wattage up."

How does it feel to have Will Smith play you in a Hollywood movie about your life?

GARDNER: It's part of life's blessings—an incredible opportunity to share the key message I talk about in my book, which is how important it is to break cycles. I never knew my father; the cycle I had to break was the men in my family not being there for their children. *The Pursuit of Happyness* may be the story of my life, but it's the book of us.

What gave you the mental and emotional resilience to survive a harsh childhood—a violently abusive stepfather, your mother's unexplained absences, constantly moving from place to place?

GARDNER: I call it "spiritual genetics." I got it from my Mom, but it's not DNA that's passed along in the genes; it's a spirit you have to choose to embrace. A comment my mother made one day became one of two pivotal events in my life. I was watching a college basketball game and I said, "Wow, one day those guys are going to make a million dollars." My mother said, "Son, if you want to, one day you could make a million dollars." I was stunned. Until she said it, it wasn't a possibility. I always knew I wanted to be world class at something. I couldn't sing, I couldn't run and catch a ball, and I couldn't dance. But I was pretty good at reading and writing. So that was my ticket.

In your book, you talk about how your Mom got you hooked on reading and education.

GARDNER: My mother was a smart, well-read woman who always wanted to be a teacher but ended up working as a domestic. She was probably her happiest when she was teaching my sisters and me. She was our professor, our Socrates.

My schoolteachers also looked out for me. In elementary school, Mrs. Broderick made me read whole chapters out loud even though I was trying to "dumb down" to be cool. In junior high, Mrs. Spellman made sure I was good at math. When my high school teacher Mrs. Mertz found out I was reading beyond my grade level, she brought me magazine articles and took me to see Handel's *Messiah.* Once she found out I had a light on in my head, she turned the wattage up. Everybody who's doing anything positive in life had a teacher who turned the wattage up and wouldn't let them turn it down.

How do you acknowledge teachers who have "turned up the wattage"?

GARDNER: Every year, my firm awards a check to the Teacher or Education Support Professional of the Year. Our first teacher was Sandy McBrayer, who taught homeless children in a San Diego school called "The Place." She used the money to give her students partial community-college scholarships, alarm clocks, and backpacks. After years of awarding money to teachers, we switched to ESPs. We had to start acknowledging that there are a whole lot of folks who make these schools work. And I can't think of a better way to honor my mom and lift her up than helping educators—the biggest part of her soul was to teach.

Do you ever talk to schoolkids about pursuing their happiness? What do you tell them?

GARDNER: That's a tough crowd. The first things kids want to know is how much money I make. For them, that's a validating question because it means: "Why should I listen to you?" My answer is always the same. If I were in the NBA, I might not be making as much as Shaq, but I wouldn't be on the bench, either. I tell them forget about money; money is the least significant aspect of wealth. It's more important to do something that makes you happy. Why do teachers teach? They've got passion for it. They do it to see the light come on in their kids' eyes.

PHOTO: AP PHOTO/M. SPENCER GREEN

ELECTION 2006

THE GOVERNOR GAMBIT

This November, as dozens of state governors ask for your vote, ask yourself this: Do they deserve it? In states like Wisconsin, Maine, and Michigan, NEA members see their governors finding money for programs and salaries, protecting jobs from privatization, and making sure students get what they need. (Can your colleagues in California say the same? We think not.) Yes, governors do make a big difference. And so do you, when you say yea or nay to them on the ballot.

BY MARY ELLEN FLANNERY

Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm

TWO WORDS: Privatization foe

THREE ISSUES:

1) ECONOMICS. "She walked into the most ungodly mess in the world when she inherited a horrible budget," recalls Connie Boylan, a Traverse City elementary school librarian. But since her election, Granholm has worked to bring Michigan back to economic health—pursuing new jobs and high-tech industry, while protecting school funding. She championed (and won) a $210 per-student increase in the state budget this year.

2) FROM PREK TO B.A. Granholm launched Michigan's Great Start preschool program in 2004, negotiated with Republican state leaders to increase state university funding, and continues to pursue her Merit Scholarship Initiative, which would give every college student a $4,000 scholarship.

3) HER OPPONENT. Let's consider the alternative. Her opponent, right-wing businessman Dick DeVos, who inherited his family's Amway fortune, is bankrolling school voucher efforts across the country. Recently, he sent a letter to Michigan superintendents saying he supports privatization efforts and competitive bidding for health plans. Boylan, an education support professional, worries about her colleagues in buses, cafeterias, and grounds-keeping teams. "To have a governor who openly supports privatization? It'll be tragic."

THE LAST WORDS:
"I just pray to God she wins," Boylan says.

BUNTING ART: STOCKBYTE, GETTY IMAGES

THE GOOD

K ♥ Maine Gov. John Baldacci

TWO WORDS: Open door

THREE ISSUES:

1) TESTING. "The assessments we were doing were just crazy," says Sally Plourde, a second-grade teacher from Westbrook. One of her colleagues had to give 12 standardized math tests a year to her fifth-graders. (And that's just math!) "As soon as you're done, it's like, 'OK guys, let's go again!'" So Maine teachers were much relieved when Baldacci ordered a much-needed moratorium on state testing this year, until a more sensible and student-centered approach can be developed.

2) SALARY. OK, it's not nearly as much as NEA believes all teachers should earn, but Baldacci's new minimum $30,000 salary for Maine teachers is a step in the right direction. After all, there were Maine teachers earning just $15,500 a year!

3) BALDACCI'S EAR. Educators have it. They appreciate Baldacci's new practitioner board, made up of teachers like Plourde, that's charged with taking a look at new educational reforms and giving practical advice to state leaders. "It's not just a title we've been given," Plourde says. "It's an open door—and he really means it."

THE LAST WORDS:

"And he's an excellent cook!" Plourde adds.

K ♣ New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson

TWO WORDS: La fuerza

THREE ISSUES:

1) MOVING ON UP. Teachers appreciate Richardson's "three-tier licensure system," which he pushed through the legislature in 2003. As a result, after five years and following approval of their professional dossier, new educators can become "professional teachers," and earn at least $40,000. Then, when they reach the third level, they're guaranteed $45,000. Last year, New Mexico's teachers ranked 41st in the country for salary—no great shakes, but the highest level in 15 years. "He pulled that through. He said he was going to do it, and he did it," says Bernalillo Spanish teacher José Cerrantes.

2) EARLY EDUCATION. Richardson demanded a Pre-Kindergarten Act that provides voluntary preK to more than 1,400 4-year-olds. His next step? Universal preK for all.

3) HIS OPPONENT. John Dendahl, former chair of the state's Republican Party, is pushing for a constitutional amendment similar to Colorado's Taxpayers' Bill of Rights. No matter what pretty name he gives it, it's bad news for school funding.

THE LAST WORDS:

"He has kept his word," Cerrantes says.

K Wisconsin Gov. Jim Doyle

TWO WORDS: Wife = Teacher!

THREE ISSUES:

1) MONEY. There's a little history here, dating back to a former governor who wasn't too fond of the Wisconsin teachers union. In 1993, he pushed through a school revenue cap, as well as a law restricting teacher raises. In many places, teachers now get less than 1 percent a year—"and some are actually giving money back!" says Tammy Johnson, a political science teacher from Wales, Wisconsin. Doyle has restored much of the funding—to the tune of $800 million plus—and he's working on those raises.

2) SCHOOL CHOICE. A hot issue in Milwaukee especially, where students can use vouchers to go to private school. "These people are lining their pockets," Johnson says. Doyle, whose wife taught in public schools for decades, has limited the program; but his opponent, U.S. Rep. Mark Green, would expand it.

3) STEM-CELL RESEARCH. Not just a hot-button issue, it's about jobs in Wisconsin's hospitals and universities. Doyle is supportive; Green is not. (And speaking of health care, Doyle also has been expanding programs for the uninsured, as well as vetoing bills prohibiting teachers from bargaining over health insurance.)

THE LAST WORDS:

"He's like the goalie," Johnson says. "All these very bad bills that are very anti-education are coming through, and he's just stopping them."

K ♦ Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski

TWO WORDS: Old friend

THREE ISSUES:

1) MONEY, MONEY, MONEY. Too-short school years and too-big class sizes aren't a distant memory, are they, Oregon? When Kulongoski took office in 2003, he inherited a "really difficult" economy, recalls Gary Sackley, a Salem counselor and state PAC chair. These days, state funding for education still "is not where we think it should be," Sackley says. But Kulongoski recently won a 6.6 percent increase to education funding over the next two years, according to his office. Next time, he promises 10 percent.

2) BENEFITS. Kulongoski's opponent, attorney Ron Saxton, has derisively called the state retirement system a "gold-plated" benefit for teachers. But abandoning the defined-benefit pension for a 401(k)-type of plan could be disastrous.

3) I DO, TOO. Think of the relationship between Kulongoski and Oregon educators as a marriage. It began with a lot of energy. In 1973, as a private attorney representing the Oregon Education Association, Kulongoski wrote the state's collective bargaining laws. But over time, the two partners may have taken each other for granted. "It wasn't like we were serving divorce papers. We just had a brief separation," Sackley says. And the governor got the message. "He has been a good friend of education....It's nice to see things back on track."

THE LAST WORDS:

"We're together again!" Sackley says.

ELECTION 2006

THE BAD

California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger

TWO WORDS: Don't forget!

THREE ISSUES:

1) BROKEN PROMISES. It's been one year since voters forced the governor to make good on his promise to return $3.1 billion that he "borrowed" from public schools. Last November, Schwarzenegger asked voters to let him off the hook. They didn't. And, says Peggy Colwell, president of the Shasta County Association, they haven't forgotten how he tried to weasel out of it, either.

2) PENSIONS. Don't think the Governator has given up on plans to terminate a defined-benefit pension plan for public employees. Last summer, after a barrage of criticism, Schwarzenegger backed off. "But I do believe he'll be back," Colwell warns.

3) HEALTH CARE. California teachers traditionally have had good benefits. Not anymore. In some districts, teachers are paying $500 a month out-of-pocket for health care. Schwarzenegger's opponent, State Treasurer Phil Angelides, has proposed the first step toward universal health care.

THE LAST WORDS: "He lied!" Colwell says.

Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty

TWO WORDS: Schmoozy and short-sighted

THREE ISSUES:

1) TEACHER SALARIES. Pawlenty's pet project has been a merit-pay system he hopes will replace traditional salary schedules. But what came out of the more moderate Legislature didn't match his ambitions. Few districts are participating, and all declined to tie salary to test scores alone. "It's more about paying teachers to grow and do things that they love," says Mary Broderick, a special education teacher and St. Cloud local president.

2) THE SO-CALLED SOLUTION. It's not bad enough that "65 Percent" fever is spreading across the country—Pawlenty wants that no less than 70 percent of education funds be spent in Minnesota classrooms. That would mean slashing money for school bus drivers, library specialists, counselors, and nurses. "He's just throwing this number out there to sound good—he's not taking the whole child into consideration," Broderick says. (His opponent, Attorney General Mike Hatch, opposes the 70 percent deception.)

3) HEALTH CARE. At least a half-dozen small, rural school districts in Minnesota don't provide health insurance to their employees. With premiums jumping 50 percent in four years, they simply can't afford it. "How do we have teachers who are working full-time, in a career, and they don't have health insurance for their families?" Broderick asks.

THE LAST WORDS: "We seem to be going backwards," Broderick says, "and that has to stop."

ONE TO WATCH

Ohio U.S. Rep. Ted Strickland

TWO WORDS: OEA alum

THREE ISSUES:

1) WHO HE IS: Strickland is a psychologist and minister who has worked in state colleges, prisons, and church youth homes—"always dealing with the needs of people," says Pam Smith, a reading specialist from Jackson, Ohio. That makes him a listener. "He's been in [my classroom]," Smith says. That kind of sensible approach has informed his efforts on Capitol Hill, where he recently introduced an NCLB reform bill to eliminate its single-test severity.

2) WHAT HE SAYS: Strickland has called for an additional $50 million a year for early childhood programs and an "Ohio Knowledge Bank" to fund college savings accounts with state money.

3) HIS OPPONENT: Strickland faces Ohio Secretary of State Ken Blackwell—the man accused of suppressing votes in the 2004 election while serving as state co-chair of the Bush campaign. Blackwell claims the "65 Percent Solution" will solve Ohio's education problems (the opposite is much more likely) and would expand the state's voucher program without additional accountability measures. Strickland agrees with neither. Need we say more?

THE LAST WORDS: "Ted's an honest person," Smith says.

CAMPAIGNING 101

So You're Thinking of Running

It's not too early to begin planning your race for 2007 or 2008. Here's how to get started.

GET ACTIVE. Volunteer with citizenship groups.

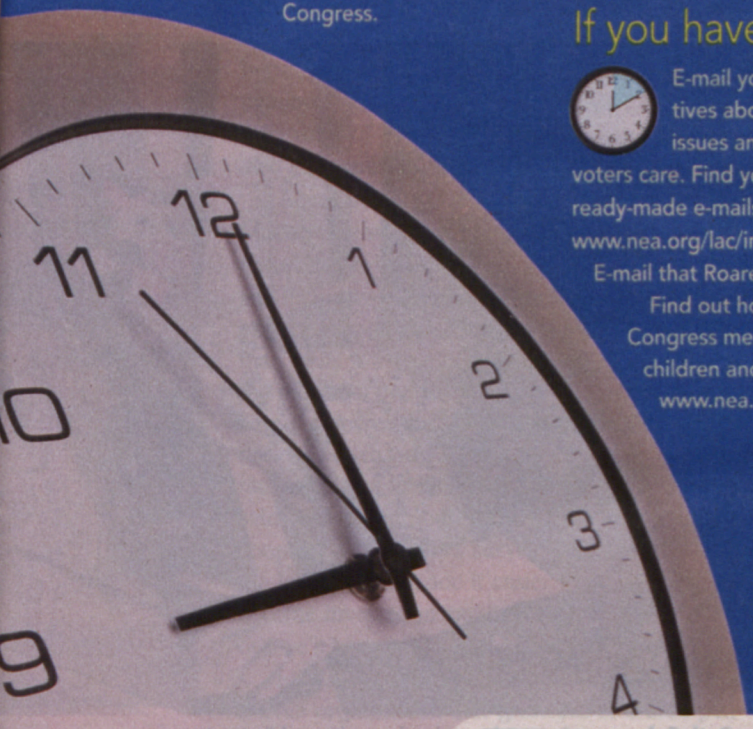
KNOW THE issues in your neighborhood.

START PRACTICING asking people for money and for their

PHOTO COLLAGE: GROFF CREATIVE INC.

THE 5-MINUTE ACTIVIST

You're busy, right? Too busy to get involved in elections? Not so fast—the life of an overworked educator can still accommodate political activism. If you've got just a few minutes at the break of day, or between picking up from soccer practice and making dinner, or even before you turn over and turn out the lights, you have time to make a difference in getting pro-public school candidates elected to your statehouse and Congress.



If you have 5 minutes:

Visit NEA's Legislative Action Center and register to become a cyber lobbyist. You can receive "action alerts" on the No Child Left Behind law (NCLB) and other important education issues by signing up at http://capwiz.com/nea/mlm/signup/.

Write a check to the NEA Fund for Children and Public Education, which supports the candidacies of pro-public education candidates. For more information, go to www.neafund.org.

If you have 10 minutes:

E-mail your elected representatives about important education issues and remind them that the voters care. Find your elected officials and ready-made e-mails on important issues at www.nea.org/lac/index.html. (See "The E-mail that Roared," page 30.)

Find out how your members of Congress measure up in supporting children and public schools at www.nea.org/lac/reportcard.html.

If you have 30 minutes:

Talk to your colleagues at work about how politics affects your jobs—through funding, class size, salary, recertification requirements, NCLB, and rules requiring paraprofessionals to go back to school.

Talk to other friends and family, too! Many people aren't aware of the day-to-day struggles educators face.

If you have 1 hour:

Read your local newspaper, pay attention to education stories, and write letters to the editor. Those letters can be an excellent way to inform the community and influence public opinion. (For help, go to www.nea.org/lac/media.html.)

If you have 2 hours:

Work a phone bank for your local Association or pro-public schools candidate.

Attend a candidate forum or rally. Hand out leaflets for your candidate.

If you have 1 day:

Volunteer at a polling station to talk to voters.

Host a "house party" where voters can meet local candidates or just talk about the issues. (It'll be fun!)

Talk to your local Association about how you can help get the vote out on Election Day.

ASK THE MAYOR

You've Got What It Takes, Too!

Like the bumper sticker says, it's too bad that the people who really know how to run the country are busy teaching. If you've ever led a lesson, stopped a fight, or talked to a parent, you've got what it takes to succeed in politics.

Just ask Mayor Larry Nelson.

"I've had good on-the-job training," says Nelson, who took a leave of absence from his middle school in April to serve at the helm of Waukesha, Wisconsin.

Long active in area politics—he served as an alderman a few years back—Nelson knew plenty of voters. That helps, as you can't win an election alone. Even though Nelson was the underdog in this largely conservative area, his volunteer ranks swelled with Democrats, Republicans, and independents.

Nelson also wasn't afraid to put on his walking shoes and knock on doors, hand out brochures and yard signs, get the 400 signatures necessary to be put on the ballot, and ask and answer questions. Then, last October, he began his campaign.

"I never missed one day of school," he says. "I didn't want even one student to go home and say, 'Mr. Nelson wasn't in school today.'"

—REBECCA L. WEBER

vote—in person and in writing. "I don't have a lot of wealthy friends," says educator and Waukesha, Wisconsin, Mayor Larry Nelson with a laugh. Still, his initial mailing to 850 friends and relatives netted thousands of dollars for his campaign.

RECOGNIZE THAT teaching abilities are crucial elements to being a successful elected official.

IF AT FIRST you don't succeed, run, run again. It's tough for a newcomer to defeat an incumbent. An initial bid for office will boost your recognition, and make a win more likely the next time around.

CLOCK PHOTOS: STOCKBYTE; NELSON PHOTO: ERIK LUDWIG

ELECTION 2006

THE E-MAIL THAT ROARED

The art of 'pajama politics' lets educators become activists anywhere, anytime.

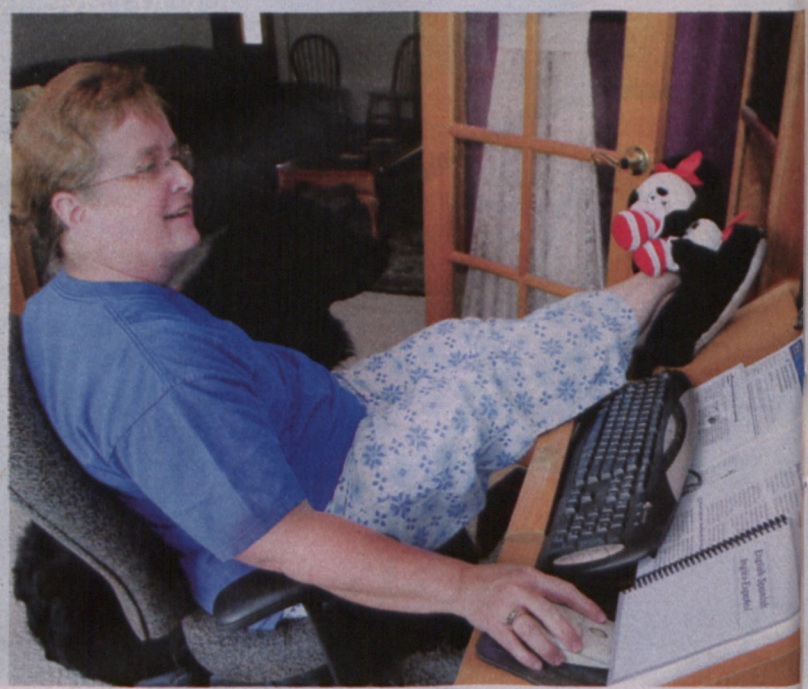
BY CINDY LONG

Mary Beth Solano, an English-language learner teacher in Fort Collins, Colorado, has long been frustrated by the so-called No Child Left Behind law (NCLB). Last summer, she decided to do something about it. She became an influential education activist, making her voice heard on the floor of Congress on Capitol Hill—and she did it without ever setting foot in Washington, D.C. All it took was a simple click of a mouse.

Solano visited nea.org and, via an online form, shared a personal experience about a struggling third-grader. "Cesar," Solano wrote, "came to me in August with not word one of English. Together with his classroom teacher, significant work with me, and a fantastic group of peers, he learned English amazingly quickly... [Cesar] set as his personal goal knowing enough English to pass [the NCLB reading test]....He struggled and struggled, reading every word...over and over again until he thought he understood well enough to answer each question....He had only been working in English since August, and the reading test was given in February....Six short months with a new language, and he took the same test as native speakers...[But] Cesar earned a score that was [two points] below the cut-off, so he was labeled an 'unsatisfactory' learner."

Solano didn't know it at the time, but her story would ultimately be read by NEA President Reg Weaver as part of testimony urging Congress to modify NCLB. It's all part of what Pam Fielding, president of Internet and grassroots advocacy consulting firm E-Advocates, calls "pajama politics." The Internet has broken down barriers to political activism, allowing everyday citizens to make a difference in the legislative process from the comfort of their homes, at any time of day or night—even while wearing pajamas and bunny slippers.

"Every one of us has a microphone online," Fielding says. "On television, the news is often filtered, and our ability to respond is limited. But all of us can go online, get the facts, and make our voices heard. It's incredibly empowering."



Mary Beth Solano can keep tabs on her lawmakers while in pjs.

Stories like Cesar's sway legislator opinion and affect the outcome of votes, and "educators have them in droves," says Fielding, who has worked with NEA for many years, at one point as a member of the Association's government relations staff. While gathering stories to help fight cuts in education, she recalls an encounter with one teacher skeptical she had anything worthwhile to say. "Should I tell them I teach in a closet because we've run out of classroom space?" she finally asked.

E-mail's Instant Impact

In the old days, when a bill to cut education funding headed to the congressional floor, NEA headquarters would call state affiliates, state affiliates would call local affiliates, local affiliates would call building representatives, and, finally, building representatives would call a meeting where everyone would gather in a room to write postcards to Congress. By the time the cards were dropped

PHOTO: RICK GIASE

in the mail, the battle was often lost.

Now, within moments, NEA can alert members by e-mail about proposed legislation and direct them to nea.org's Legislative Action Center, where they can send ready-made messages to their representatives asking them to vote for or against a bill. Simply enter a ZIP code, select the appropriate text, hit submit, and voilà—instant activism.

"It's very powerful, and it works," Fielding says.

Last March, the Senate passed the Specter-Harkin amendment to the FY07 congressional budget resolution, which added $7 billion for education and health programs. The amendment, which passed by a 73-27 margin, reversed significant budget cuts made the previous fiscal year—an outcome due, in part, to a flurry of e-mails from NEA members. Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) praised NEA members and other activists for "the hundreds of thousands of phone calls and e-mails...which created a tsunami that just could not be stopped."

According to research by the Congressional Management Foundation, Capitol Hill staffers report that personal interactions between members and their constituents, including e-mails, have more impact on members' decision-making processes than visits from lobbyists. And the more personal the message, the greater the impact. Of those surveyed, 44 percent said that when their boss hasn't decided which way to vote, a personalized communication had a lot of influence; another 52 percent said it had some influence. Nearly 80 percent of congressional staffers surveyed said they believe the Internet has made it easier for constituents to become involved in public policy; and 48 percent believe it has made lawmakers more responsive.

Eli Pariser of MoveOn.org, the well-known activist organization that grew out of a 1998 petition asking Congress to "move on" past the impeachment proceedings of President Clinton, has helped power the Internet's political punch. Pariser joined MoveOn in 2001, at the ripe age of 21, and directed its campaign against the Iraq war, tripling the site's membership in the process. Now, as MoveOn.org's political action executive director, he uses the Internet to mobilize more than 3 million members to sign online petitions, send e-mails to elected officials, organize demonstrations, and donate money for political advertisements and campaigns.

"Time and again, we've forestalled or blocked bad policies and enacted good legislation," he says. "Often, members of Congress will think nobody is paying attention to a particular bill. We've been able to demonstrate that they're wrong."

Many people look at what they sometimes consider a convoluted or corrupt political system, and wonder what one letter, e-mail, or phone call could do. A lot, says Pariser. "The Internet allows you to act together on a particular issue," he says. "Your one voice is raised from a single whisper to a deafening roar when combined with others taking the same action."

Taking action online is the first step to making sure you're represented in the Washington lawmaking process, according to Pariser, who points out that there are about four special interest lobbyists for every member of Congress. "Most aren't interested in what's best for the country, but what's best for their clients, who often represent big business," he says. "They're not interested in the common good."

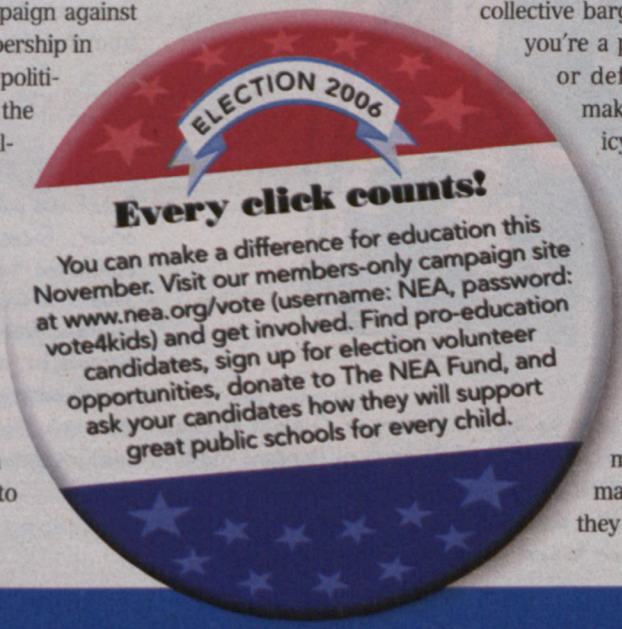
The 'Influentials'

That's why it's vital that education professionals—whose work is focused on the common good—make their voices heard.

"Teachers represent one of the few blocks of our society with the knowledge and credibility to make a strong case for the things we need to do to make our communities better," Pariser says.

Fielding agrees. She says educators may not know it, but they represent a portion of America's "influentials"—the 10 percent of society who, according to the Institute for Politics, Democracy & the Internet, "tell their neighbors what to buy, which politicians to support, and where to vacation."

Among educator influentials are school support professionals—the bus drivers, custodians, food service workers, paraprofessionals, security guards, nurses, secretaries, technicians, and skilled trades professionals. They represent a large voting block, and a powerful one: They're highly connected to the community, not only through their schools, but also through religious organizations, their children, and community groups like VFW, little league, soccer teams, or neighborhood watch committees. And they're significantly impacted by politicians' economic decisions—whether to raise the minimum wage, for example, or to enforce overtime or health and safety laws, or to guarantee employee rights to collective bargaining or due process. "When you're a public employee, you help elect or defeat your own bosses, which makes you unique," says NEA policy analyst Dave Winans.


ELECTION 2006
Every click counts!
You can make a difference for education this November. Visit our members-only campaign site at www.nea.org/vote (username: NEA, password: vote4kids) and get involved. Find pro-education candidates, sign up for election volunteer opportunities, donate to The NEA Fund, and ask your candidates how they will support great public schools for every child.

Which is exactly why educators should participate in politics. "They have high credibility with the public, and with lawmakers," Fielding says. "Everyone knows that educators care passionately about their students and the issues that affect them, and in just two minutes on the Internet, they can make a difference. It's two minutes they can't afford not to take." nea

BUTTON PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

Roadeo's gantlet consists of 11 skill stations, including vehicle inspection, railroad crossing, student loading, and parallel parking. (And you thought you hated parallel parking your car!)

NEA member drivers like Deborah Massey of Chuluota, Florida (first in line), and Linda Wilson of Bladensburg, Maryland (third), wait to board an early-morning bus that will carry them over the Roadeo course. With practice runs prohibited, it will be their only chance to see the course before they compete.

They come from different states, with drivers come for the same re

ROA

BY CYNTHIA KOPKOWSKI

It was early morning, and more than 100 people were mustering at a ski lodge perched high above Lake Tahoe. They weren't there to hit the slopes or admire the breathtaking view, They were bus drivers. Darn good ones. Having triumphed in state driving competitions, they earned a place in the prestigious International Safety Competition, affectionately known among drivers as the "Roadeo." Nineteen of them had the added distinction of being NEA members.

Winning at the Roadeo involves executing a lengthy set of driving maneuvers so precise that many competitors descend from their buses shaking their

Relief was palpable on many drivers' faces as they completed their runs. Jaye Jaye Knickelbein emerged from her bus a bit nervous, but at the evening's awards ceremony, she walked away with top honors in the small bus category.

varying years of experience. But the
ason: to be the best at the...

DEO

Before the drivers mount up for their ride, they must familiarize themselves down to the inch with the size of the vehicles they'll be driving. Dana Opp takes measurements at set intervals so she can visualize clearance distances once out on the track.

heads. There's also the matter of the arduous written test of driving skills and laws.

When the dust settled after a long day, NEA drivers demonstrated why they are some of the best on the road. Jaye Jaye Knickelbein of Cadiz, Kentucky, and Dana Opp of Flint, Michigan, earned two of the three first-place finishes in their respective divisions. Three others earned Top 10 finishes.

"This is not something you can do without a lot of advance work," Jeff Butson of Hopkinsville, Kentucky, said as he prepared to mount up for his fifth Roadeo ride. "I work at it, and I work at it hard. You have to."

Left: Nothing seemed to escape the judges' notice as they prowled each of the Roadeo's stations in search of major and minor infractions.

Right: Jennette Visser of Byron Center, Michigan, tells a volunteer how she wants her side mirrors adjusted.

THE ROADEO ACTION DOESN'T END HERE. HEAD TO WWW.NEA.ORG/ROADEO FOR:

ROADEO ROUNDUP * A complete list of NEA drivers, plus pictures and stats.

VIDEO HIGHLIGHTS * All the action from this year's Roadeo, including interviews with NEA member drivers.

SLIDESHOW * Want to see even more pictures from the event? Head to the Web.

PIT CREW * NEA members share driving and discipline tips. You can weigh in, too!

PHOTOS: JIM DECKER

2.7 Milion Minds

are Better than One

Get great ideas for teaching and classroom management from the best in the business — educators like you!

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It's all delivered to your in-box once a week, from educators all over the country.

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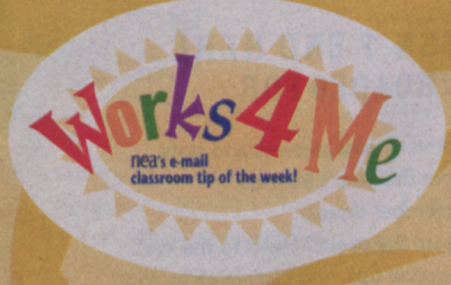


MEET THE (STUDENT) PRESS

INSIDE:
Law & Justice, Money

Issue 4 Volume 1 October 2006

As school publications struggle with the age-old issues of limited resources and censorship, many students may be losing interest in the power of the press—and their own rights.

BY REBECCA L. WEBER

Two days before Maurice J. McDonough High School's *RamPage* is scheduled to go to press, sophomore Meg Ren sits at a worktable in the middle of the windowless publications room, drafting an article on the No Child Left Behind law (NCLB) in longhand. Meg signed up for journalism to get a tech credit without using computers, but her strategy backfired—newspaper advisor Kim Eggerton has all the students at the Pomfret, Maryland, school shift roles throughout the year.

A classmate loudly declares that she has none of the articles she needs to lay out the 8-page issue in Adobe InDesign. With a paragraph of her NCLB story written, Meg walks over and delivers a headline for her to type in: "Pah-nah-see-ah or disaster. Question mark." She misspells panacea, and Meg corrects her.

"You might want to use language that the average ninth-grader understands," says Nancy Belle, an old hand who's been reporting since middle school.

"But it's a cool word," Meg replies with a smile. "They'll look at it and think, 'pancake.'"

On the periphery of the room, where most students are working on a hodge-podge of leftover computers, some a decade old, Kayla Moore downloads images from a digital memory stick purchased by (and borrowed from) the yearbook staff. Unlike most students in this elective class, Kayla says she doesn't particularly like to write. But, she adds, "I want to be able to answer people's curiosities."

Maryland newspaper advisor **Kim Eggerton** manages to keep the presses—and her students—rolling.

In the context of high school journalism, in which administrators frequently vet—and sometimes censor—student publications, that isn't always as easy as it sounds. When she filed a story on sexually transmitted diseases, Kayla's principal excised half a dozen paragraphs. "I was really sad. I wanted to fight it," she says. "But what happens happens. What can you do?"

Censorship of student journalism has been a constant issue since well before the Supreme Court's 1988 *Hazelwood* decision, which ruled that school-sponsored publications do not have full First Amendment protection. What has changed, though, is how students like Kayla feel about those rights. Nearly three-fourths of high school students surveyed by the Knight Foundation either don't know how they feel about the First Amendment or admit they take it for granted. Just 51 percent believe that newspapers should be allowed to publish freely without government approval. "Our nation's high

See STUDENT PRESS, next page

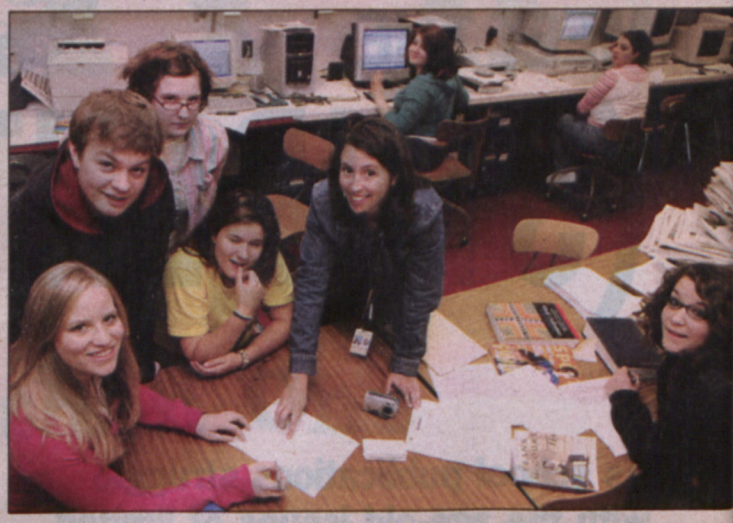
PHOTO: CHARLES VOTAW

Meet the (Student) Press

Continued from previous page

schools are failing their students when it comes to instilling in them appreciation for the First Amendment," say the study's authors, who surveyed over 100,000 high school students as part of the Future of the First Amendment project.

That future appears to be a mixed bag. While only 21 percent of the nation's high schools have no form of student media, 40 percent of high schools without papers have eliminated them within the past five years, the survey said. And while most administrators recognize that j-students learn to ask better questions than "Is this going to be on the test?" conduct personally meaningful research, write effectively, work in groups, and flex leadership skills, the elective isn't their top priority. Some 85 percent say they'd like to expand their schools' media programs, but usually cite finances or student apathy as reasons why they can't.



Exposure to student media programs like McDonough High School's *RamPage* boosts awareness of First Amendment rights, experts say.

Mark Xandrine Sneed knows a bit about student apathy and limited resources. Counselors at his Oakland, California, school used to use his journalism class as a dumping ground, he says. But when his students found out that athletes at McClymonds High School had special access to new computers and the Internet while they were stuck with ancient machines and no printer, they wrote an article. "Before the second issue, we had new computers," Sneed says. "The kids watched and saw the power of words."

The occasional op-ed on what to wear to prom or sports story on month-old b-ball tournaments may be inevitable, but accountability and exposure frequently fuel investigative passions. Earlier this year, for instance, high school journalists in Minnesota won national attention after methodically uncovering the true identity of a 24-year-old sex offender posing as a 17-year-old British royal at their school.

Not all stories see the light of day, though. Only one-quarter of principals surveyed by the Knight Foundation agreed that high school students should be allowed to report controversial issues without their approval. While liability issues are frequently touted as the reasons for prior review, most often it's

LEGAL AID

WATCHING THE WATCHERS

Law & Justice

Same-sex marriage. War in Iraq. White House cover-ups. With mainstream media focusing on these headlines, it's not surprising that student journalists want to take on the same issues from a teen perspective. But what makes for hot copy in a student newspaper or yearbook can also give administrators cold feet.

"Addressing those issues has caused an increase in school administrators' [attempts] to censor the student press, to sanitize the school paper," says NEA Assistant General Counsel Michael D. Simpson, who previously served as the Student Press Law Center's (SPLC) executive director. "The student press is addressing a whole slew of controversial issues, which enhance the reaction of administrators to try and shut them down."

Mark Goodman, executive director of the Arlington, Virginia, nonprofit, says that censorship attempts remain the group's top concern. SPLC's mission is to "advocate for student free-press rights and provide information, advice, and legal assistance at no charge to students and the educators who work with them." That breaks down to not only tirelessly providing specific advice on media law to students, advisors, and administrators when problems arise, but also offering all manner of workshops and materials for classroom use.

SPLC offers a wealth of online and print resources—like its book, *Law of the Student Press*—to help youth and adults. Getting grounded in press law is a cornerstone of many journalism classes, and teachers can download Microsoft PowerPoint presentations on key issues. If students or advisors find themselves in a position where they have no alternative but to go to court, SPLC helps find lawyers willing to donate their time. (See their site at www.splc.org.)

Coverage of adolescent sexuality has long been a flashpoint in censorship issues, but it's changed dramatically in SPLC's three decades. Articles dealing with gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender issues or oral sex have largely replaced teen pregnancy articles, which now seem almost quaint. While an op-ed about gay rights is not new from a national perspective, its appearance at many schools is still groundbreaking—and potentially problematic for administrators.

Even when students don't succeed in saving a controversial story from the cutting-room floor, it's often a teachable moment. For students "who aren't about to overcome censorship in an immediate sense, we are able to help them anticipate the next act of censorship they might confront, and work to avoid that," says Goodman.

not about legal protection but controlling messages, says Mark Goodman of the Student Press Law Center (SPLC), which offers free legal assistance to student journalists and advisors (see "Legal Aid," page 36). "Schools treat [prior review] as if it's normal and respected," Goodman says, "but really it teaches a troublesome lesson about the role of an independent press."

Linda Ballew, the Dow Jones National High School Journalism Teacher of the Year, knows the value of nurturing relationships with administrators. Her own principal at Great Falls High School in Montana visits the newspaper room, dines with the staff, and has even attended scholastic journalism conferences. But last spring, senior Roman Stubbs wrote a story involving a freshman who'd stabbed another student. Roman's reporting took several months: he researched court records and interviewed the school psychologist and assistant principal. Legal consultation established that using the name of the student was acceptable, as the minor's identity was already a matter of public record. Still, Ballew knew the danger of publishing a story charged with violence and racial tensions. She gave her principal a heads-up before the article went to press so he would be prepared for phone calls from parents.

But it was Ballew who wasn't prepared for a phone call. While at the spring National Scholastic Journalism Convention with some of her staff, issues of the new magazine hit campus. Soon after distribution began, the administration confiscated nearly 1,000 copies. Ballew only found out after a student called her cell phone.

Once back in Great Falls, Ballew provided documentation establishing that the student's privacy had not been violated, and the issue was ultimately distributed. Roman and some of Ballew's other students would later decide that the seized paper was itself newsworthy. "It's not going to be front page news, but it will be in the newspaper again," Ballew says. The administrators, she adds, "know it's coming."

At McDonough, Eggerton hasn't experienced similar levels of controversy over the *RamPage*. But her principal's practice of prior review has prompted self-censoring among students, she says.

"When tossing out ideas, they'll say, 'Oh, we can't do it because it will get stomped on.' And I've said, 'Let's see if that's the case,'" says Eggerton. "I'm not going into that battle if they don't want to."

Eggerton is better prepared to fight that battle than most advisors. When she applied for jobs teaching English two years ago, she made sure to pitch her previous career as an editor. But about three out of five student media advisors did not consider teaching the subject until after they were out of college, and few have substantial journalism experience of their own.

While the changing world of media and the Internet are new challenges for advisors, in McDonough's publications room, none of the computers are networked, and the students aren't too concerned about being broadcast competitive. They do care about watching their peers open the paper to read about testing, safe sex, and the latest tunes. For this to happen, they need to get to press on time. Which, at many student publications, winds up being the greatest challenge of all.

By the end of the period, with deadline now just one day away, senior Lauren Pierce, *RamPage*'s editor, looks at a mostly blank page and plugs in reminders such as "Caption about prom." When she sees the headline for the still-unwritten NCLB article, she half-jokingly asks, "What's the pancreas story about?" nea

BOOSTING THE BOTTOM LINE

CHEMISTRY TEACHERS DON'T FUNDRAISE FOR LAB EXPERIMENTS, BUT JOURNALISM CLASSES USUALLY COVER THEIR OWN COSTS.

Most student newspapers have to balance their budgets by actively looking for advertising. "I consider selling ads part of the curriculum," says Maryland advisor Kim Eggerton. "It's part of how journalism works." Here are a few ways to help pay for the power of the press:

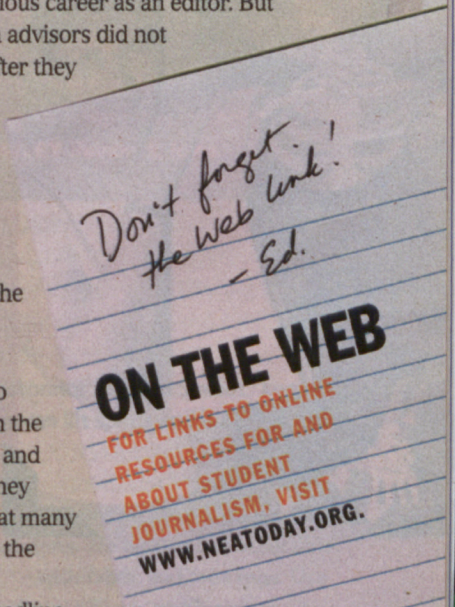
Money

GATHER DEMOGRAPHIC DATA about the spending power of your school's students and brainstorm how to present it for maximum impact, suggests Sandy Woodcock of the Newspaper Association of America. For example, instead of telling a local business that teens spend an average of $87 per week, tell them that the 2,000 students at your school have an annual buying power of over $9 million.

EARLY IN THE YEAR, have students learn layout by making dummy ads for local advertisers. Approaching potential clients with the mock-ups will help small businesses readily see the possibilities.

THE HIGH SCHOOL AD NETWORK is a new venture connecting national advertisers with high school papers. Visit www.highschoolads.org.

A LOW-COST ALTERNATIVE to costly newsprint and ink is taking your student newspaper online. The American Society of Newspaper Editors and the Knight Foundation sponsor the not-for-profit Web service http://my.highschooljournalism.org, which hosts sites for $50.



ON THE WEB

FOR LINKS TO ONLINE RESOURCES FOR AND ABOUT STUDENT JOURNALISM, VISIT WWW.NEATODAY.ORG.

PHOTO: CHARLES VOTAW

Lounge Acts

ASK ANY TEACHER. *The staff lounge isn't just another room—it's a haven for harried educators, a sanctuary for stressed-out staff, an oasis of sanity in a Lilliputian world. No matter how much they love the kids, educators need a corner of the school to call their very own. So what makes any self-respecting lounge worthy of its restful name? Ultimately, you say, it's not comfy couches or tranquil colors, it's friendly colleagues ready to listen. Check out the lounges* NEA Today *voted "Most Likely To Inspire."*

MOST POPULAR MASCOT

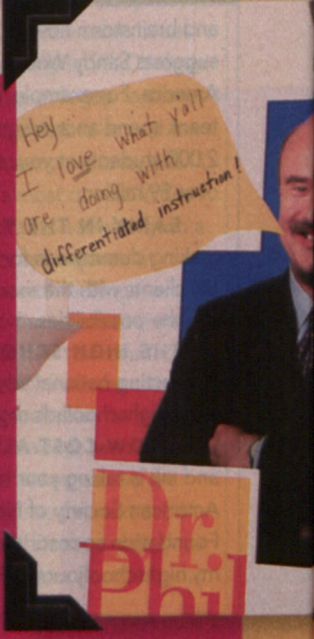
A place to "rest your weary bones" strikes a special chord with the teachers at York Elementary School. Our lounge, affectionately named "The Escape Hatch," contains the usual kitchen appliances, along with a white board for special announcements. But we also have a life-size skeleton from our upper-grade science classes. "Bones" has always managed to dress appropriately for whatever occasion we're celebrating. Bones has been a cowboy, worn a bikini, been "pregnant" for baby showers, been decked out à la Betty Crocker, and always wears pink and denim on Breast Cancer Denim Day in October. Of course, food is always present at these celebrations, and Bones is the only one who hasn't gained any weight over the years!

CAROLYN SANDALL *York, Nebraska*

MOST LIKELY TO WIN AMERICAN IDOL

We transformed the Spring Grove Middle School lounge from a bland room where staff gathered to complain to a "French café" with Parisian posters and atmospheric floor lights where colleagues can have a snack (and maybe even catch a show). We end the week with a potluck meal beneath a poster of Dr. Phil telling us what a great job we're doing, and we've even held an after-school coffee house, where a colleague played guitar, serenading us by candlelight. The show was such a hit, we plan to bring back retired teachers as featured musical and comedy acts. It's a fun way for educators with a wealth of experience to meet and encourage new teachers.

ANTHONY BACHMAN
Spring Grove, Pennsylvania



BEST MAKEOVER

Imagine how we felt when we walked into our lounge at the beginning of the school year only to get the shock of our lives. Our principal, his wife, the assistant principal, and a PTO mom had spent their weekend working on an extreme makeover. The once stark white walls were painted a buttery yellow. One area of the room held a new couch and chair with colorful pillows, large plants in beautiful planters, and a sleek magazine rack; and our once-bare lunch tables were decorated with placemats, flowering plants, and candy dishes. But that wasn't all—soothing music from a CD player welcomed us as we walked in! Now the staff at Connoquenessing Valley Elementary School has a great haven where we can hang out, laugh, cry, and, above all, share.

MICHELE ZORN *Zelienople, Pennsylvania*

MOST LIKE HOME

Time to spruce up the Reinbeck Elementary School faculty lounge, but how could we make a big impact without blowing our budget? A former colleague who's a retired teacher-turned-decorator came to our rescue, and the school, local businesses, and a parent group donated money and supplies. The decorating plan: hide the clutter, make the dining area more intimate and less institutional, and turn our lounge into a "home away from home" where staff could collaborate in comfort. We used paint donated by a local lumberyard, bought secondhand furniture, found bamboo shades for the windows, and made curtains to cover shelving. A piano bench from an antique store became a coffee table and decorative baskets held school supplies. We even turned a bulletin board into a "window" by having a student paint a relaxing pastoral mural on the board and hanging white shutters on each side of the "view." It was really satisfying to hear the oohs and aahs of our surprised colleagues when they returned to school.

PATTIE BAILEY *Reinbeck, Iowa*

Need a Makeover?

Does your staff lounge have all the warmth and charm of a hospital ward? Retired teacher-turned-decorator Melinda Smaldt "knows how stressful and demanding the classroom can be," which is why, she says, sprucing up your lounge can lift spirits and build morale. She shares cost-conscious tips for making your lounge into a "mini-vacation spot."

THINK OF THE FUNCTIONS your lounge needs to serve—eating area, workspace, sitting area—and if you've got the space, design a part of the room for each need.

CHOOSE ROUND TABLES FOR EATING. They're more conducive to conversation and collaboration.

RECYCLE OLD OR DISCARDED FURNITURE with a coat of paint or new coverings and use accessories to make the space more interesting. Pictures, plants, or baskets are easy to obtain and something staff can bring from home.

HIDE CLUTTER on shelves with curtains on tension rods or pull-down window shades. Needed items are hidden but accessible.

SOFTEN THE ROOM'S LOOK with fabric and area rugs. Use fabric for window treatments, throw pillows, or slipcovers—it makes the room feel less institutional.

SOLICIT NEEDED ITEMS from local businesses, parents, or other staff members.

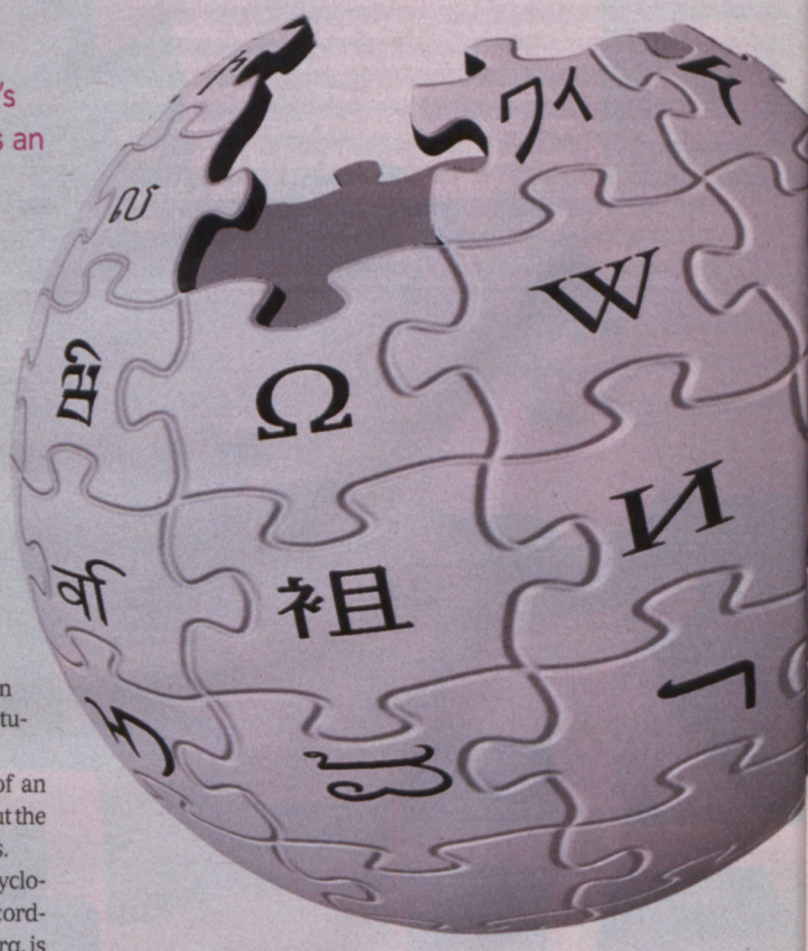
ON THE WEB: Your colleagues share more ideas for inspiring staff lounges at www.neatoday.org.

PHOTOS LEFT, CENTER TOP, AND RIGHT: LISA KYLE; BOTTOM CENTER: COURTESY OF ANTHONY BACHMAN

Getting WIKI With It

An online encyclopedia that anyone can edit? Depending on whom you ask, that's Wikipedia's greatest strength—or weakness. Either way, it's an object lesson for Web-savvy students.

BY CINDY LONG



BRENT FRECCIA, A SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHER AT Newark High School in Delaware and a self-proclaimed "avid wiki-person," created an entry for his school on Wikipedia, the oft-visited online encyclopedia and go-to source for students writing research papers. He provided details on the school's history, its academic and athletic achievements, district and demographic information, a list of the school's organizations, and even a section for interesting trivia. A few months later, the entry was vandalized.

"It is also not only home to several drug dealers and moderately to severely drug addicted teenagers, but also an outlandishly steep count of fear and stupidity," an anonymous user wrote.

"Obviously, this is not the work of an objective mind [or] a true statement about the environment at my school," Freccia says.

The first wiki, WikiWikiWeb, is named after the "Wiki Wiki" line of Chance RT-52 buses in Honolulu International Airport, Hawaii. "Wiki-wiki" means "hurry quick" in Hawaiian.

Wikipedia calls itself "the free encyclopedia that anyone can edit." (A wiki, according to its self-titled entry on wikipedia.org, is a Web site that "allows any visitor to edit its content.") It's because of this open editing feature that Wikipedia draws praise, criticism, and, at times, vandals. Depending on whom you ask, its unfettered access is Wikipedia's greatest strength or its greatest weakness. And because of that disagreement, Wikipedia can be a powerful tool for educators trying to teach information literacy in the digital age.

"A lot of teachers limit student use of Web sites for research projects, but I feel that limiting access only hurts the students," Freccia says. "There is so much out there, students just have to learn how to 'read' the sites and how to research accordingly."

Wikipedia co-founder Jimmy Wales has described Wikipedia as "an effort to create and distribute a multilingual free encyclopedia of the highest possible quality to every single person on the planet in their own language." As of August 2006, Wikipedia contained more than 4.6 million articles in 200 languages, including more than 1.3 million in the English-language version.

Although Wikipedia's openness allows visitors to alter entries—past examples of abuse include members of the House of Representatives removing broken campaign promises from their entries and a user from the CIA vandalizing an article on the current president of Iran—most vandalistic edits are quickly found and deleted by "Wikipedians," the volunteer editors and contributors who number just over 1 million. About 1,000 editors have been selected by the Wikipedia community as trustworthy enough to serve as administrators. Notably, nearly one-third of these are age 18 or younger.

The vandalism to Freccia's entry on Newark High School was cleaned up by a "hall monitor"—a member of Wikipedia's Recent Changes Patrol, a division of the site's Counter Vandalism Unit. The offending edit was removed and because he was the creator of the entry, Freccia was notified. "If the hall monitor hadn't changed it back, I would have done so," he says.

A "deletionist" is a Wikipedian in favor of deleting some pages that others prefer to keep. It's often used as a derogatory term.

The "Pokémon test" holds that any topic more notable than the most obscure species from the animated television series may deserve a Wikipedia article.

Given what the site calls its "radical openness," its own online description admits that an "article may be, at any given moment, in a bad state, such as in the middle of a large edit, a controversial rewrite, or recently vandalized." On the other hand, "having a very large number of active writers and editors in many languages, Wikipedia often provides access and breadth on subject matter that is otherwise inaccessible or little documented." Some of Wikipedia's editors have called this approach a "socially Darwinian evolutionary process."

But by allowing anyone to contribute, critics claim that Wikipedia is not authoritative and is unreliable. Bernard Haisch is president of the Digital Universe Foundation, which is creating the "anti-Wikipedia"—a peer-reviewed encyclopedia site counting academics and experts among its contributors.

"Our aim is to provide a venue where the world experts can put their best information that's been looked at and vetted by the academic community and can stand up to scrutiny," says Haisch, who hired Wikipedia co-founder Larry Sanger to help him develop the Digital Universe after Sanger publicly criticized Wikipedia's lack of respect for expertise.

Currently in beta form, the Digital Universe will be a multi-year project its founders hope will become the "PBS of the Web." The project was inspired by the "Encyclopedia Galactica" envisioned by Isaac Asimov, which is a hypothetical encyclopedia of a future galaxy-spanning civilization, containing all the knowledge accumulated by a society with trillions of people and thousands of years of history. (This definition, it should be mentioned, is from Wikipedia.)

If lack of expertise is a fault, one of Wikipedia's clear advantages is its ability to update quickly as events unfold. (A 2006 Israel-Lebanon conflict entry was created on July 12, six hours after Hezbollah militants captured two Israeli soldiers.) To keep the Digital Universe timely with entries about breaking news and events, Haisch says it will create a separate news section containing citizen journalism, with one important distinction—anonymous comments will not be allowed. "People don't always engage in good behavior when they don't have to stand behind what they're posting," he says.

Unreliable resources—in any medium—are nothing new, according to Adam Frey, co-founder of Wikispaces, a wiki hosting company with a large educator member base. "Wikipedia is a great way for students to learn the fact that every resource must be checked, and it's a great starting point for research," he says.

When students cast their nets into the ocean of online information, they're bound to come up with some rubbish. Many educators believe it's all part of the learning process and the development of information literacy.

"I think everyone, students and teachers, should be wary of 'popular' reference sources available on the Web," says John Hauser, the former librarian of Central Bucks East High School in Buckingham, Pennsylvania. "I could not emphasize this enough with students who would accept any source as long as it was printable. It's vital for teachers to emphasize the importance of students using reliable resources, rather than taking the first item listed on [Wikipedia] or on a search engine."

But with wiki technology, students can go beyond simply reading sites to helping write them as well, fulfilling the Web's promise of becoming a fully interactive medium. According to Frey, whether or not Wikipedia is a reliable source is beside the point. Its value, he says, is in its collaborative nature. "It's an organic product, it's an interactive product, and it's a community product," he says. "You can't compare it to traditional resources. It encourages us to accept that in today's world, anyone can be a published author."

In fact, Frey wants to advance that notion, which is why he helped create Wikispaces with educators as a target audience. "Classroom work is about engaging students with content, enabling them to contribute and collaborate, and being able to measure their contributions. Wikis are a perfect tool for this kind of work," he says. "It's a way for the student to digest and produce information in collaboration with other students and the teacher....The fun comes from students being able to work with each other and take responsibility for the learning process....They get a real buzz out of seeing their part of the project live on."

January 15 is known as Wikipedia Day to Wikipedians. On this date in the year 2001, the wiki-based Wikipedia project went public.

After creating the Newark High School entry on Wikipedia and "tweaking" entries on other topics of interest, including Fort Miles (a military installation during World War II in Delaware) and favorite television shows (like *Star Trek*, *24*, and the *Amazing Race*), Freccia decided to take it a step further by creating his own personal wiki—"Wikifreccia"—on Wikispaces.

He's found in his wiki a useful way to eliminate handouts, to enable parents to follow along with what is happening in his classes, and to allow students who missed class to download work that needs to be made up. He's found that the collaborative nature of the wiki site helps students work together and build upon each other's research, allowing everyone to get involved. And because edits are clearly visible in history pages, students take more responsibility for their contributions. Best of all, it engages his students.

"Engaged students are interested students," Freccia says. "If they have a means to learn in addition to the traditional classroom—with resources and the ability to connect with one another—the possibilities are endless." nea

On the Web:

See an interactive example of wikis at work at www.neatoday.org.

ILLUSTRATION: WWW.WIKIPEDIA.ORG

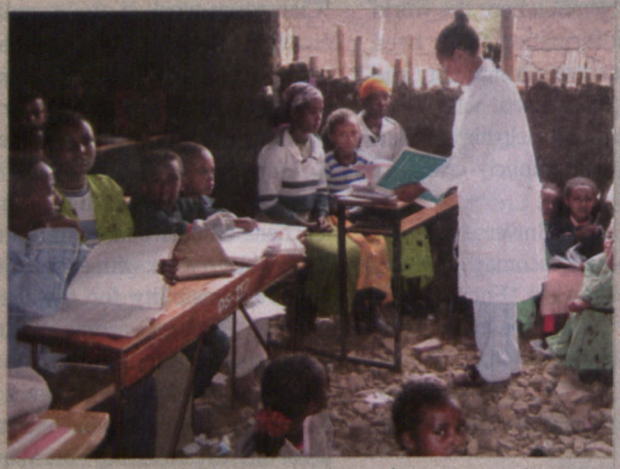
Living Dangerously in Ethiopia

In this African nation, a union membership card might as well be a ticket to prison.

Last year, on November 9, a 53-year-old teacher at a junior high school in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa was arrested at school. For more than six months, she lingered under harsh conditions in her prison cell, yet police never showed a warrant or charged her with a crime. She might still be there if Education International, the international education union of which NEA is a founding member, had not looked into her detention.

In Ethiopia, just being a teacher could make you a criminal—and, if you belong to the Ethiopia Teachers' Association (ETA), it makes you all the more suspect. The ruling party of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi considers both teachers and students to be supporters of his opposition. And the ETA, the Ethiopian equivalent of NEA, has long been a thorn in Zenawi's side.

The ETA was created in 1949, but in 1993 government officials decided they would prefer a weaker union. So the government set up its own group—with the same name. This hasn't just been confusing for members, it has also made it much easier for the government to seize all the assets of the authentic ETA.



Every morning, this Ethiopian teacher welcomes more than 60 students, ages 8 to 16, to her primary school class.

Since 1993, ETA's bank accounts have been frozen, its dues have been redirected to the shell organization, and ETA buildings have been sealed and ransacked. Last year, police occupied the two remaining ETA offices for two weeks without warrants, and seized all their equipment and paperwork.

ETA's leaders are constantly threatened. In 1993, President Taye Woldesmiate was fired from the University of Addis Ababa after signing a letter condemning government violence against student demonstrators. Three years later, under false allegations, he went to prison for six years—spending years in chains, in solitary confinement. Although he received the EI Human and Trade Union Rights Award in 1998 in Washington, D.C., he couldn't accept in person. (On his behalf, NEA and other union officials met with the National Security Agency at the White House.) In 2005, he left the country for his safety.

One year later, in his absence, the government again filed trumped-up treason charges against him. This time, they carry a death sentence.

And he's not alone. Members of the ETA national and regional boards are regularly jailed—or worse. In 1997, security forces assassinated ETA Deputy General Secretary Assefa Maru, while other officers seek exile abroad. Educators are constantly harassed, fired, and subjected to unfair working conditions. Even now, teachers languish in prisons all over the country.

Of course, this has taken a toll on ETA's ability to organize. By order of the government, its meetings are illegal—attendance can lead to attack. Even ETA paperwork is considered contraband in schools.

For more than a decade, the international teachers' movement has stood by its colleagues in Ethiopia as they have faced this crisis, writing protest letters to the Ethiopian government, filing complaints with the International Labor Organization, and networking with human rights organizations. NEA also has played an active role—the Association has sent a series of "urgent action appeals" to Ethiopia's government and speaks frequently to the U.S. State Department on ETA's behalf, while NEA leaders and staff have visited the country many times. In 1995, shortly before his incarceration, Woldesmiate represented ETA at the NEA Representative Assembly. He returned in 2003, giving a stirring address to delegates.

Education International also provides financial support to teachers who have suffered harassment. In jail, teachers aren't paid, but their extended families often depend on that salary (about $50 to $80 a month) for survival.

"Our morale and energy to act is greatly enhanced with the support and helpful suggestions offered by international colleagues," Gemoraw Kassa, ETA's general secretary, says.

—DOMINIQUE MARLET

Dominique Marlet is Human and Trade Union Rights Coordinator at EI. For more information, visit www.ei-ie.org or www.nea.org/international.

PHOTO: DOMINIQUE MARLET

Should schools accept corporate advertising and sponsorships?

YES In an ideal world, schools would have all the money they need to fund programs and buy equipment, but we're not living in Utopia. Public and private colleges accept money from plutocrats every day. I'm not very happy that our gym is named for Shop Rite, the local supermarket, but I do think that public schools should accept well-meaning contributions from the community, and businesses are an important part of the community. I believe that we can't educate our children without the efforts of everyone.

Shop Rite has been very kind to our school. They allow our special education students to intern at the store, and they donate food for needy families when we ask them. The store never attempts to push any curriculum ideas on us; they don't require us to do business with them. The management has been enormously supportive over many years. They have also pledged $100,000 over a 20-year period. In return, we have their name and a shopping cart logo on our new gymnasium.

I have mixed feelings about this. The sign smacks of advertising and commercialism. This neighborhood store, one of a small chain, is owned by members of the Brown family, and I would prefer having their name on the gym.

Another generous local business family gave us money for library books in honor of their parents. I am quite happy to say our new library is called the Flowers Media Center.

KATHLEEN McMAHON teaches fourth grade at Alice Costello School in Brooklawn, New Jersey.

NO It is unacceptable that in the richest and most powerful country in the world, a public school should lack the resources necessary to educate its children. A free, quality public education must be one of a democracy's top priorities, and it must be immune to any market-driven force. We, as a nation, must unite and rally for well-funded schools for all. Our children deserve nothing less. Allowing advertising in our schools opens a Pandora's box. We must resist selling out our schools to the highest bidder.

The idea that advertisers would take advantage of the financially beleaguered conditions of many of our public schools should come as no surprise. Advertising is a market-driven enterprise, and schools represent an untapped market potential. Upon entering our schools, the advertisers would dictate the placement of their billboards, banners, and lightboxes. The highly visible areas normally reserved for students' artwork, bulletin boards, and school/community message centers would be taken over. It would only be a matter of time before advertisers would attempt to have a hand in the curriculum, molding a school into a corporate image.

Studies show that Americans are subjected to thousands of commercial images every day. There are already more than enough forces vying for our children's attention. Schools must remain sacred spaces whose sole purpose is the education of our youth, not the manipulated development of product loyalty.

MANNY LOPEZ teaches fourth grade at the International Community School in Oakland, California.

OTHER VOICES

Here's what other educators are saying on our message boards. Join the debate by visiting www.nea.org/debate.

I THINK IT would be very dangerous for public education if we allowed corporate sponsorship of schools....The federal government wants to stop paying for education, and I believe it's all part of the plan to privatize public education.
DIANE YGLESIAS, Plainfield High School, Plainfield, New Jersey

SEVERAL YEARS ago when my son was playing football for our rural high school, the team traveled to the Atlanta metro area for a game. When we entered the stadium, there were signs advertising Delta Airlines....this type of sponsorship... creates an unfair advantage for one school within a district. It also gives students a warped sense of the world. They think everything is up for sale—ethics, morals, children.
ELIZABETH GOULD, retired teacher from Chatsworth, Georgia.

THE ARGUMENT that children are brand sensitive is, of course, true. But...they are already walking, talking billboards who are exposed to countless advertising images on a daily basis....Corporate sponsorship already exists in every school, anyway....The fact is, education is in dire straights. Why not tap into the resources of the wealthiest aspects of our commerce-driven society to help the kids?
ROSS GREINER, Frederick High School, Frederick, Colorado

WHAT'S YOUR OPINION?

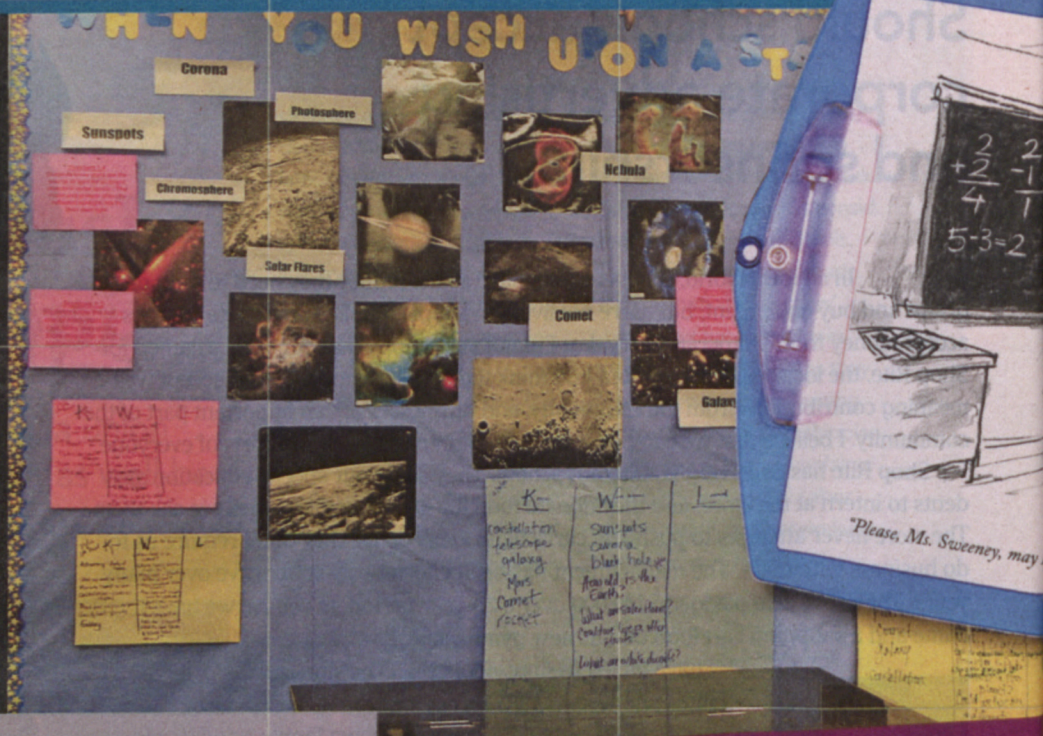
Are virtual dissection simulations an acceptable substitute for real animal specimens? Join our next debate and see your name in print! We'll choose from among the discussion board responses for the next issue of *NEA Today*. Visit www.nea.org/debate.

ILLUSTRATION: GETTY IMAGES

BEST BOARDS
Space Wall

I have numerous English-language learners in my eighth-grade astronomy unit, so I created a visual word wall with striking space photos from calendars and National Geographic magazines. Having pictures of unfamiliar space terms is extremely helpful—both my students and I refer to the wall all the time during each lesson. This idea works well for any science word wall. Pictures aren't just for elementary students; they're helpful to any ELL or special needs student who needs visuals to learn difficult science vocabulary.

EMILY WAISANEN
Sixth- and eighth-grade science teacher
Tustin, California



GIGGLES

FACE VALUE

While dismissing my second-grade class one day, I reminded the children that we had to come to school on a planned day off to make up for a snow day that had happened earlier in the year. The next morning one of my little girls came in with lipstick and lots of blush on her cheeks, so I gave her a little frown and quietly asked her to wash her face before the bell rang. She gave me a puzzled look and said, "But you told us today was Make-Up Day!"

GLORIA NEWBY *Second-grade teacher, Hampton, Virginia*

BEYOND COMPARE

One day our class assignment was coming up with similes. I reminded my students that a simile must compare two things and use "like" or "as." One student's comparison? "My laptop is, like, way better than your computer."

CHERYL GILLILAND
Middle school teacher
Roanoke, Virginia

WHAT MAKES YOU SMILE?
Send a fun story to Sabrina Holcomb, **sholcomb@nea.org**.

Grading Homework

I see homework as a student's first attempt to independently practice the lessons I taught in class that day. I want to encourage them to attempt the practice, but not kill their grades if they don't get most of the problems right. When students come to class, I go around the room and stamp their homework. I use different character stamps (that they really love even in high school), and I only stamp their work if they attempted most of it. Then we go over the homework together so they can get the feedback they need. Students keep their stamped homework in notebooks until the next unit test. On that day, they gather all the homework assignments leading up to that exam, staple them together, and turn them in. They get one homework grade based on how many assignments they have stamped. This system helps students stay organized and keep track of their work, and it reinforces the use of homework to study for tests.

DEBORAH NASIR
High school math and computer teacher
Pasadena, Texas

Proximity Praise

When a student is off task or misbehaving, you can often remedy the problem by complimenting another student nearby for being on task, quiet—whatever positive behavior you want to focus on. Usually this praise brings immediate improvement. If it

TOP TIPS

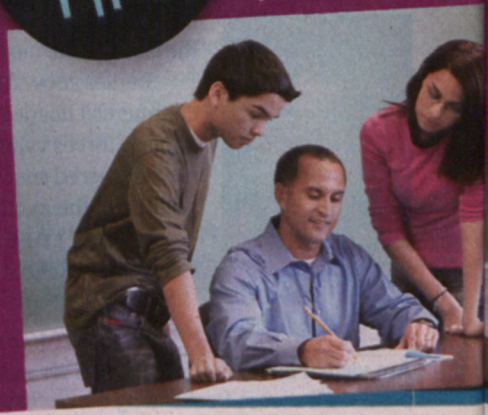


PHOTO TOP: COURTESY OF E. WAISANEN; GIRL PHOTO LEFT: REBECCA EMERY; APPLE/ORANGE PHOTO: RUBBERBALL; PHOTO ABOVE: JACK HOLLINGSWORTH

doesn't, compliment a student on the other side of the "target student's" desk. The offender will usually stop the misbehavior. Then, you should compliment the offender for the good job he or she is doing. You have now: 1) allowed the child to be responsible for his or her own behavior; 2) turned a negative situation into a positive one; 3) given the student a way out without embarrassment; 4) established the fact that you are in control; and 5) made yourself look pretty cool to the whole class. Students will appreciate the fact that you took action and didn't embarrass them or their friends. This method has stopped 90 percent of the conflict in my classes. It's an easy way to get the message across without any collateral damage.

DAN DUNCAN
Elementary music teacher
Hudsonville, Michigan

Solving the Problem for MATH SUBS

How can middle and high school math teachers prepare for substitute teachers who may not be able to teach the math?

JAN GROSS *Caldwell, Idaho*

ANSWER: As early in the year as possible, I prepared my high school and middle school math students for substitute teachers by role-playing. I pretended I was a sub who didn't understand the math my students were working on as we went through the day's lesson. Sometimes they would tackle a new topic by working in cooperative groups, sometimes by reading aloud, and sometimes by guided practice. Together, we selected students who could work as helpers, and we decided the best way to check homework. After two or three days of practicing these procedures with me, I found my classes could usually make good progress on the days I was absent. The entire process of preparing them for my potential absences served not only to reinforce learning and teach responsibility, but also to teach them that they were capable of learning on their own—a valuable lesson to take to college or into a career.

DALE COCHRAN
Retired math teacher
West Chester, Pennsylvania

ANSWER: Have the teachers in the math department compile a variety of reality math activities. These could include balancing a checkbook, comparing the math on buying and leasing a car—even introducing an amortization schedule. My personal favorite reality math activity is to have students guess my monthly net wages, then I subtract my monthly bills. It's a huge eye-opener. Most subs have a nodding acquaintance with these activities, so they are less intimidating than calculus.

SUSAN ELLRICH
Teacher for gifted classes,
North Palm Beach, Florida

off the mark.com
by Mark Parisi
OVER 70% OF MY SURFACE IS COVERED IN WATER... THE REST IS DIRT...
ETHAN BLUFFS HIS WAY THROUGH HIS EARTH DAY ASSIGNMENT

Share your wisdom, ask your question!

What's the nicest thing a colleague has ever done for you?

Send your answers to these or other questions on this page to **sholcomb@nea.org**. Or, send us a question you'd like to see posted. Please include your name, your job, and the community and state where you work.

For a weekly e-mail of questions, answers, and practical classroom tips, join Works4Me, one of NEA's most popular and useful services. Just send the message "subscribe Works4Me" (without the quotation marks) to **Lyris@list.nea.org**.

TOP CARTOON: FROM *THE NEW YORKER BOOK OF TEACHER CARTOONS*. REPRINTED BY PERMISSION. IN STORES NOW OR CALL 1-800-869-1231. BLOOMBERG PRESS, 2006; CHECKBOOK PHOTO: C SQUARED STUDIOS; CLASSROOM PHOTO: NATHAN HAM; CARTOON: MARK PARISI

Rebate Debate

BY DEBORAH A. WILBURN

A while back, I sprang for a Belkin wireless network card that would enable me to pick up any available Internet connection when traveling with my laptop. It was about $100, but the CompUSA salesperson convinced me it was a good deal since Belkin was offering a $40 rebate. I sprang for it and carefully cut the UPC code from the box, filled out the hard-to-read form, and included my receipt. Did I ever get my refund? Nope. After waiting several weeks, I sent an e-mail to Belkin to find out when my rebate would be forthcoming, only to be told that it wouldn't be. According to them, I hadn't bought "the product required for rebate." Say what? At this point, I had neither the paperwork nor the time to double-check whether this was true or not, although I had bought that particular product because I was told that a rebate was available. Turns out, many of you may share a similar story.

While it's hard to come by hard statistics, collecting a rebate can be as difficult as buying snow boots in July. In fact, delayed and unpaid rebates have caught the eye of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). Last year, the FTC settled charges against CompUSA and the manufacturer of QPS and CompUSA brand products for allegedly failing to pay, in a timely manner, rebates on thousands of products.

The moral of the story? Taking the rebate bait may not be such a good idea. According to Ed Mierzwinski, consumer program director of the U.S. Public Interest Research Group, a consumer advocacy organization in Washington, D.C., collecting on rebates can be "a royal pain in the neck"—which he knows firsthand after having jumped through various hoops to collect five rebates totaling $210.

His advice? "Consumers should shop around and see if they can get as good a deal elsewhere." If you can't and decide to go the rebate route, says Mierzwinski, "insist that the store give you two copies of each rebate receipt, one to mail and one to keep, make extra copies of any UPC codes, especially if they require you to mail an original, and note the dates when you mailed the rebate requests." If you don't get your money in the time promised, make them feel your pain: Report it to the retailer, your state attorney general's office, and the FTC.

Tax Write-offs for Educators Jeopardized

We know too well that educators don't earn the big bucks—but they're still willing to shell out an average $443 per year for school supplies that benefit their students. Other educational expenses often are paid out of their own pockets as well: A recent NEA survey found that 75 percent of teachers participate in professional development. And let's not forget the cost of testing or coursework required under the No Child Left Behind law to become certified or "highly qualified." Teachers have the privilege of footing that bill, too. Shouldn't Uncle Sam give teachers a break on these expenses?

He used to, but he won't start doing it again if you don't get involved today. A tax law giving teachers and paraprofessionals a $250 deduction for educational expenses expired on December 31. With the deduction in place, educators in the 25 percent tax bracket who claimed $250 of expenses saved $62.50.

"NEA is working tirelessly with Congress to extend and increase the $250 educator tax deduction," says Al Campos, NEA federal lobbyist. "If educators make their voices heard with their members of Congress, it would help immensely."

Bottom line for teachers: Do something! Visit NEA's legislative action center at www.nea.org/lac. Enter your zip code and send a letter about the Teacher Tax Relief Act to your representative and senators. Tell them you need your break back!

TOP ILLUSTRATION: RAYMOND MEDICI; BOTTOM ILLUSTRATION: GARY S. CHAPMAN

Build That Nest Egg

Say you got a $2,000 windfall. What would you do with it? Pay off bills? Take a vacation? Go on a shopping spree? While there is wisdom in using found cash to pay off debts, it may be smarter to sock that money away and think of it as your emergency fund. "Few people have an emergency fund," says Bonnie Hughes, a fee-only financial planner with A&H Financial Planning and Education Inc. in Kennesaw, Georgia. "But it's a mistake. It means you end up using credit cards for emergencies, or money that was intended for other financial needs or goals." She says most families should set aside at least three months of expenses to deal with life's calamities.

Where to stash that cash? Hughes recommends putting it in a money market account (which usually pays a higher interest rate than savings accounts) to keep it easily accessible or, if you can tie it up for a few months, a certificate of deposit (CD). "Both of these accounts are paying pretty good rates right now," she says. Look for money market accounts with no fees attached. In terms of CDs, shoot for one that compounds interest daily. NEA Member Benefits offers two possibilities with competitive rates. You can open an NEA-sponsored money market account with a $500 deposit and an NEA-sponsored CD with $1,000. Both offer yields ranked among the highest in the nation and are a nice, safe way to make your emergency stash grow.

www.neamb.com

How I Saved a Buck!

Lynda Pilgreen, teacher, Garner, North Carolina

I bought a small dorm refrigerator (I found mine for about $20 at a yard sale) and keep it in my classroom to store water, drinks, and my lunch. That keeps me from spending money (and calories!) at the cafeteria and soda/snack machines every day.

Got a great way to save some cash? E-mail the Money editor at ckopkowski@nea.org with your tips for being thrifty.

Is It Worth It?

Organic Food

They want $2.99 a pound for organic nectarines at the health food store when the regular ones are on sale at the grocery store for $0.99 a pound?! We all know that organic costs more—sometimes as much as 50 to 100 percent over the price of regular produce, dairy products, and meats. While few of us can afford to go totally organic, the good news is you don't have to.

According to researchers at the Environmental Working Group (EWG), an advocacy group in Washington, D.C., certain fruits and vegetables carry higher pesticide residue than others. Here's where it pays to go organic: Apples, bell peppers, celery, imported grapes, nectarines, peaches, pears, potatoes, red raspberries, strawberries, and spinach.

If possible, buy organic meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy: You'll bypass the hormones and antibiotics used under regular production methods. Feel free to skip organic seafood, since fish (wild or farmed) can contain mercury and PCBs. And don't waste your money on organic shampoos and body lotions. Personal care products are typically made from chemicals. Those made from natural ingredients, like aloe vera, are "organic" no matter how they're labeled.

I Spent How Much?

A look at the big and small ways NEA members spend their money.

Halloween Decorations

All those paper pumpkins and black cats on your classroom windows add up fast. The National Retail Federation estimates that consumers spend roughly $7 billion each year on Halloween decorations, candy, and costumes.

TOP ILLUSTRATION: RUBBERBALL; RIGHT ILLUSTRATION: GETTY IMAGES; PHOTO: MARTIN CHILD

A Side Gig Ready for Sautéing

This California teacher is a fun guy when it comes to (ahem) fungi.

STEVE BOWEN'S BEEN TEACHING biology for 29 years, but he's fostered a fungi fascination even longer. A mushroom gatherer since childhood, he now hunts them for commercial sale and also uses them to teach ecology to students at Leland High School in San Jose.

"I bring in mushrooms, and we discuss their biology and multiple roles in ecology," Bowen explains. "Sometimes I'll even sauté them!" But they can't taste all the mushrooms—consider the aptly named death cap. "The polypeptide in death caps shuts down the liver; I really detail the process with AP students," he says. Since Bowen volunteers for the local poison control center, the hospital sometimes sends over mushrooms for immediate identification during class, to students' delight.

Many of Bowen's students enter scientific fields, just as Bowen pursued his mushroom fascination after a teacher's encouragement.

"My college microbiology teacher was also fascinated and got me identifying and picking mushrooms safely," he says. In 1979, a friend told him that restaurants would buy gourmet mushrooms such as chanterelles and porcinis. Now he spends up to four hours daily in the Santa Cruz Mountains, the Sierra Nevadas, Oregon, and Colorado hunting mushrooms—whose sale supplements his teaching salary.

He relishes foraging, but the classroom is Bowen's first love. "Mushrooms don't give much feedback," he chuckles. "I really love teaching."

—NORA SHALAWAY

PEOPLE POLL

You find $1,000 in an old coat pocket and for once you don't need it for bills or to buy supplies for your classroom. How do you spend it?

A special trip—33%; Home decoration or renovation—27%; Charity—13%; Boosting my book, movie, and CD collection—13%; Clothes—7%; Electronic gadgets—7%

Head to www.neatoday.org to vote in November's Poll:

What would you put in a time capsule that best captures your essence?

From Buses To Bluegrass

A band of Oregon ESPs fiddles around with that high, lonesome sound.

When not piloting their school buses through the streets of the Salem/Keizer School District, Ken Cartwright and his buddies navigate bluegrass favorites as The Emerald Valley Boys.

Cartwright, on guitar, mandolin, and vocals, became a bus driver in September 2005 at the urging of bandmate and veteran driver Clyde Clevenger. Clevenger's wife Nikki plays bass and provides vocals. Banjo player and vocalist Donn Whitten joined the busing department earlier this year. Once Whitten was on board, the entire Emerald Valley Boys lineup comprised certified bus drivers—leading some to suggest the band should be called The Bus Boys and Girls. They're happy with their name, but the group is mulling a bus-inspired song for the next album.

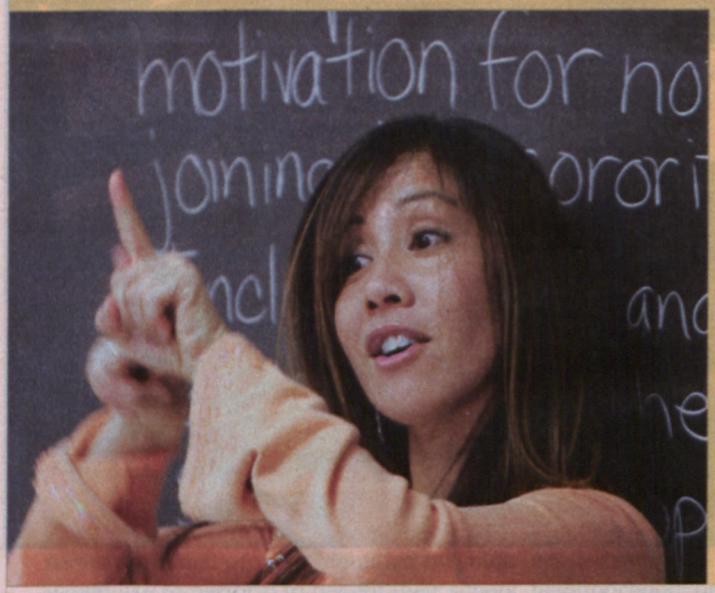
"Every time we have a social function, the staff will ask them to play," says Michael Hawkins, the district's assistant manager for transportation operations. They've performed at a few assemblies for elementary students, but Hawkins wants it to become a regular gig, highlighting the importance of bus safety.

—ALAN J. MCCOMBS

PHOTO TOP: VICKI THOMPSON/ALMADEN RESIDENT; BOTTOM: AMBER COLE

Forging a Different, Distinguished Path

Deafness inspires rather than deters this teacher.



WHEN SHE TURNED SIX, Maya Yamada of Ottowa, Canada, went deaf. Jump forward 32 years, and the teacher of deaf students at Eleanor Roosevelt High School in Greenbelt, Maryland, has become one of only a handful of deaf teachers to earn prestigious National Board certification.

Certification came after a year of navigating the Board's rigorous application process, interviews, and presentations. She did it all, getting some help on applications from a study partner who knew how to sign, and an interpreter who guided her through the interviews and presentations. She says she never let her deafness "create any obstacles or barriers."

Yamada considers her deafness an opportunity to help others who cannot hear through teaching. "I knew it was my purpose in life," she says.

She came to Eleanor Roosevelt High in 1996 and immediately created a sign language class and a dance company composed entirely of deaf students. Later, she organized a hearing-loss support group for students, parents, and staff, and trained faculty on deaf and hearing-impaired students' needs. Adept at reading speech on others' lips, she conducts her classes through a combination of speaking and signing, a mix she calls "total communication."

Throughout her career, she has refused to call herself disabled. "I am an avid reader of emotional and spiritual growth," she says. "I'm on a journey in life to live above and beyond."

—RICK DOCKSAI

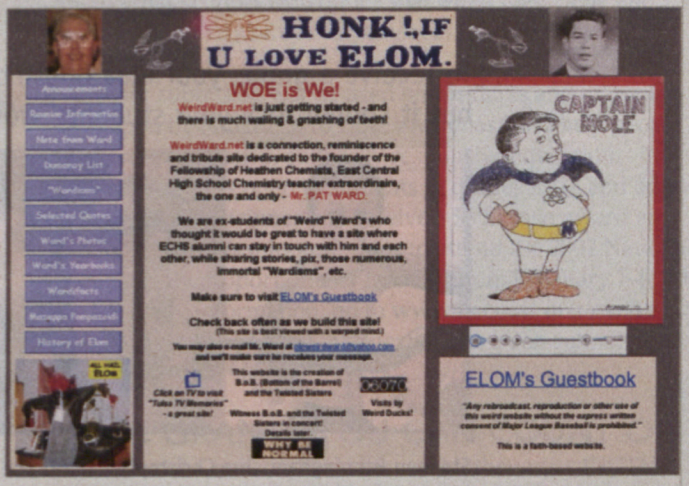
WeirdWard.net

An Oklahoma teacher gets a unique tribute.

SOME THINGS border so closely on indescribable that you just have to see them yourself. Consider the tribute to former chemistry teacher Pat Ward, Oklahoma-Retired. Weirdward.net is the wackiest, yet most touching Web site homage to a chemistry teacher we've come across on the Internet. Make that the *only* Web site homage to a chemistry teacher we've come across. With more than 6,000 page views since its creation in January, the site is a word-of-mouth phenomenon.

Some of Ward's former students conceived the idea after one was diagnosed with ALS and Lyme disease and the beloved teacher visited to cheer him up. Dana LeMoine and his siblings perused Ward's trove of East Central High School memorabilia, thinking that a Web site dedicated to his classroom years was in order, not only to thank him for taking decades of students under his wing, but also to reunite all "Weird Ward" alums.

Now folks from across the country and as far as the Netherlands and Iraq are clicking in. They're finding a site jammed with "Wardifact" photos and cartoons, "Wardisms,"


HONK IF U LOVE ELOM.
WOE is We!
WeirdWard.net is just getting started - and there is much wailing & gnashing of teeth!
WeirdWard.net is a connection, reminiscence and tribute site dedicated to the founder of the Fellowship of Heathen Chemists, East Central High School Chemistry teacher extraordinaire, the one and only - Mr. PAT WARD.
We are ex-students of "Weird" Ward's who thought it would be great to have a site where ECHS alumni can stay in touch with him and each other, while sharing stories, pix, those numerous, immortal "Wardisms", etc.
Make sure to visit ELOM's Guestbook
Check back often as we build this site!
CAPTAIN HOLE
ELOM's Guestbook

and scans of every yearbook signature page Ward saved from 1960 to 1988. "Weird, ole' buddy, you're with me every day I step in front of my class," writes Joe Matheson, now science department chair at Tulsa Memorial High School, in the site's ever-lengthening guestbook.

Ward is humbled by all the attention. But he certainly isn't hovering over a computer; in fact, he doesn't even own one. On monthly visits to the LeMoine siblings, he just chats and sees who's dropped by his site.

—CYNTHIA KOPKOWSKI

GOT A TIP?

Do you have an interesting story tip? Contact Cynthia Kopkowski at **ckopkowski@nea.org**.

PHOTO TOP: MARVIN JOSEPH/THE WASHINGTON POST

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To receive a grant, your idea doesn't have to be earthshaking, but it should rock your students' world.

Stephen Birmingham, Jim Christopher and Grace Konopacki, teachers in Wheeling, Illinois, had a great idea to help students learn through music. The NEA Foundation gave them funding to make it happen. Your idea could be grant worthy, too. Visit us online to learn more and apply today.

THE NEA FOUNDATION

www.neafoundation.org
202.822.7840

resources

53 **Grants & Awards** NEA's Youth Leaders for Literacy grants encourage students to create reading projects in their own communities.
55 **Take Note** Bring the Civil Rights Movement alive for students with an interactive Web unit.
56 **In Print** Be afraid—be *very* afraid—of our roundup of seasonal titles!
59 **NEA's Read Across America** It's not too early to plan for our 10th anniversary party.
59 **Heads Up from NEA Member Benefits** Don't be caught unaware by proposed changes to 403(b) retirement plan regulations.
60 **On the Web** At last—a Web site with links just for middle school teachers.
61 **Diversity Calendar** The end of Ramadan and a recipe for Persian poppy seed cookies.
62 **On TV** Find out how some communities make their own Thanksgiving traditions.
62 **Books by NEA Members** A young boy learns about politics by launching a campaign to get his mother elected mayor.

Mini-Grants Fund Small, Selfless Acts

Pay It Forward mini-grants are designed to fund one-time-only service-oriented projects identified by youth as activities they would like to perform to benefit their school, neighborhood, or greater community.

Projects must contain a "pay it forward" focus—they must be based on the concept of one person doing a favor for others (expecting nothing in return), who in turn do favors for others, with the results growing exponentially. Some winning students have made get-well cards for hospital patients. Others have participated in walk-a-thons to raise money for Meals on Wheels and performed plays for people in nursing homes. The hallmark of these activities is that they are small and doable.

The Pay It Forward movement is the real-life reaction to the novel by Catherine Ryan Hyde, which was followed by the creation of the Pay It Forward Foundation and the Warner Brothers movie.

Schools, churches, and community youth groups (with an adult sponsor) may apply for a mini-grant, which has a maximum award of $500. **October 15, 2006**, is one of three annual deadlines for applications. For more information, visit the Web site at **http://payitforwardfoundation.org/.**

PAINT YOUR VISION, WIN AN AWARD

The National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCRESt) is sponsoring a national art contest in conjunction with its National Forum. NCCRESt seeks to capture the vision of artists about what schools would look like when they value and include the backgrounds, experiences, and heritage of *all* students.

Work submitted will be used on products and materials developed by NCCRESt to raise awareness and help people understand inclusive, culturally responsive education.

The contest is open to students in grades K–12 and adults. The grand prize winner will receive a $300 cash award and a trip for two to Washington, D.C., to attend the 2007 National Forum on Disproportionality in Education, February 7–9, 2007.

For more information, go to **www.nccrest.org/events/events/art_contest.html**. Applications must be submitted by **October 31, 2006**.

MATH GRANTS YOU CAN COUNT ON

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) offers two grants for schools and math teachers.

In-Service Training Grants provide financial assistance to schools for in-service education for K–8 teachers. Eligible schools—those with a current NCTM K–8 school membership—can receive up to a $4,000 award. Proposals must address need, mathematics content, the scope of the plan, other sources of funding, the number of teachers and students affected, distribution of costs, urban-rural isolation, and the needs of a multiethnic student body.

For information about grades K–5, go to **www.nctm.org/about/met/olander3.htm**; for information about grades 6–8, go to **www.nctm.org/about/met/olander.htm**.

The deadline for applications is **November 3, 2006**.

ILLUSTRATION: GETTY IMAGES; PHOTO: CHRISSI NERANTZI

Classroom-Based Research Grants for grades K–12 are designed to support and encourage classroom-based research in precollege mathematics education. The research must be a collaborative effort involving one or more K–12 classroom teachers and a college or university mathematics educator (a mathematics education researcher or a teacher of mathematics learning, teaching, or curriculum). Eligible applicants—teachers with a current NCTM membership or those who teach at a school having a current K–8 NCTM school membership—can receive up to $8,000. The college or university mathematics educator must be a member of NCTM.

The deadline for applications is **November 3, 2006**.

For details, visit **www.nctm.org/about/met/begle.htm**.

INTEL'S 'JUNIOR NOBEL' PRIZE

Each year Intel conducts its highly regarded precollege Science Talent Search, a nationwide competition honoring outstanding young scientists who have completed original research projects. Applicants are judged by a national jury of highly regarded professional scientists on individual research ability, scientific originality, and creativity. The competition is open to all U.S. high school seniors.

Each of 300 semifinalists will receive a $1,000 award for outstanding science research. Forty finalists will receive an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, D.C., to attend the weeklong Science Talent Institute in March 2007. At the end of that week, 10 Intel scholarship winners will be announced. The top prize is a $100,000 four-year college scholarship. For more information, visit **www.intel.com/education/sts/index.htm**.

The deadline is **November 15, 2006**.

GO OUTSIDE AND LEARN SOMETHING

Lowe's Charitable and Educational Foundation, International Paper, and *National Geographic Explorer!* magazine have partnered to create outdoor classroom grants that provide schools with additional resources to improve their science curriculum by engaging students in hands-on experiences outside the traditional classroom. All K–12 public schools in the United States are welcome to apply.

This school year, the program will award grants up to $2,000 to at least 100 schools. In some cases, grants for up to $20,000 may be awarded to schools or school districts with major outdoor classroom projects. The grants can be used to build a new outdoor classroom or to enhance a current project.

Applicants will receive International Paper's Life of the Forest Classroom Kit. The kit, which contains 10 full-color posters, 10 teaching guides, and 20 booklets, can be used in the classroom. For contest guidelines and information, go to **www.lowes.com/lowes/lkn?action=pg&p=AboutLowes/outdoor/apply1.html**. Applications may be submitted **year round.**

NEED TIME FOR ART?

Recognizing that art teachers often lack the time and resources to reconnect with the artistic processes they teach, the Surdna Foundation encourages arts educators from specialized, public arts high schools to apply for funding for artistic development through its Arts Teachers Fellowship Program. This initiative supports the artistic revitalization of outstanding arts teachers.

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CONT1006

NEA Foundation Grants

The NEA Foundation awards over 100 grants each year to support educators' efforts to close the achievement gaps, develop creative learning opportunities, and enhance their professional development.

THE NEA FOUNDATION
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Student Achievement Grants of $5,000 fund work that engages students in critical thinking and problem-solving that deepens their knowledge of standards-based subject matter, and emphasizes inquiry, self-directed learning, and critical reflection.

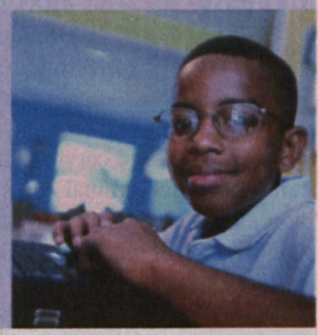
Learning & Leadership Grants of $2,000 (individual) and $5,000 (group) provide opportunities for educators and school employees to engage in high-quality professional development and lead colleagues in professional growth that improves practice, curriculum, and student achievement.

All practicing K–12 public school teachers, education support professionals, and faculty and staff at public higher education institutions are encouraged to apply. Applications may be submitted at any time and are reviewed three times per year, including **October 15, 2006** (see table below).

For grant guidelines, applications, and descriptions of recently funded projects, visit **www.neafoundation.org**. Or call (202) 822-7840.

GRANT DEADLINES

Application Received by:	Applicant Notified by:
February 1	June 15
June 1	November 15
October 15	March 15



Fellows will design individualized courses of study that provide immersion in their own creative work and the opportunity to interact with other professional artists in their fields. The goal is to enhance the effectiveness of arts teachers and directly benefit the young people they teach. Eligible applicants must be permanently assigned full- and part-time arts faculty in specialized, public arts high schools. The maximum award granted is $6,500. Go to **www.surdna.org/programs/programs_show.htm?doc_id=326426&attrib_id=120401** for information.

The deadline for applications is **November 17, 2006**.

HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW?

Established eight years ago by the Rodale Institute, the Organic School Garden Awards inspire youth to improve their health and that of the Earth by gardening organically and promoting regenerative gardening practices.

Any school in the 50 states with an organic garden used for educational purposes may enter. As part of the entry process, applicants must write an 800-word essay about their garden and create a photo poster.

The bronze winner will be awarded $250; the silver winner will receive $500; and the gold winner will take the top prize of $1,000. All schools that apply will receive a certificate of participation.

For information, go to **www.kidsregen.org/gardens/index.shtml**. For a look at previous winners and their gardens, visit **www.kidsregen.org/gardens/2005/winners.php**.

The deadline is **October 31, 2006**.

THE SPIRIT OF COMMUNITY SERVICE

Sponsored by Prudential Financial and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), the Prudential Spirit of Community Awards recognize students in grades 5–12 who demonstrate exemplary community service.

Schools and officially designated organizations may select one middle school and one high school honoree for every 1,000 students. Local honorees are judged at the state level, and 102 honorees from the 50 states and the District of Columbia will be named in February 2007. Each state honoree will receive $1,000 and an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, D.C., (May 5–8, 2007) with one parent or guardian. While there, 10 national honorees will be chosen to receive an additional $5,000, a gold medallion, and a trophy for his/her school. For more information, go to **www.principals.org/s_nassp/sec.asp?CID=539&DID=48173**.

The deadline for applications is **November 7, 2006**.

YOUTH LEADERS FOR LITERACY GRANTS

An initiative of NEA and Youth Service America (YSA), Youth Leaders for Literacy grants help youth direct their enthusiasm and creativity into reading-related service projects.

Something powerful happens when youth are involved in literacy service—they receive the intrinsic rewards of community involvement, but they also learn more about the importance reading plays in their own lives.

Young people age 21 or younger can apply, either individually or as a group. Grant applications should propose youth leadership in developing and implementing a literacy project that begins on NEA's Read Across America Day, March 2, 2007, and culminates on YSA's National Youth Service Days, April 20–22. The proposal must include a scheduled activity (e.g., read-aloud session, trip to the library, book-making, etc.) for each week of the project period. Twenty grants of $500 each will be awarded, with winners announced in January 2007. Go to **www.nea.org/readacross/volunteer/index.html** for information.

The application deadline is **November 24, 2006**.

PHOTO AND BOOKS ILLUSTRATION: GETTY IMAGES

Take Note

HPV and Cervical Cancer Awareness

At NEA's 2006 Representative Assembly (RA), the NEA Health Information Network (HIN) conducted a workshop on the human papillomavirus (HPV) and cervical cancer awareness for 50 NEA Student members. This training explored the relationship between HPV and cervical cancer and emphasized the importance of having annual Pap smears. It also provided information about Gardasil, a new vaccine that prevents four strains of HPV, two of which are linked to 70 percent of all cervical cancer cases.

As the result of a New Business Item passed at the RA, NEA HIN will broaden its work to raise awareness about cervical cancer, about the relationship between cervical cancer and HPV, and about the availability of the vaccine. For more information on cervical cancer, HPV, and the public information campaign "Tell Someone," visit www.neahin.org.

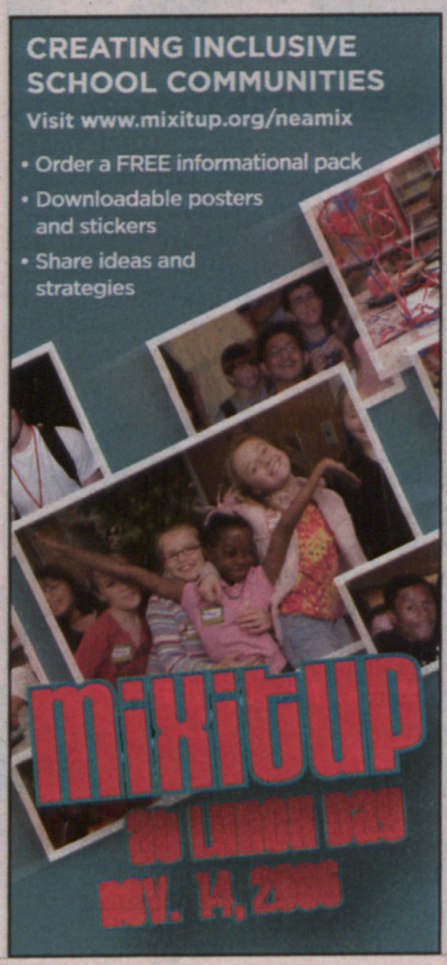
Brochures on these topics are available for your next in-service, local Association meeting or community health fair. Send an e-mail to **info@neahin.org** to place an order.

Free Best Practices Materials

Are you interested in accessing the latest research and using it for school improvement? NEA has commissioned a set of research synthesis papers authored by nationally recognized experts that compare typical educational practices with research-based best practices. Each report is accompanied by a short summary brief. Topics include theories of learning and teaching; learning-centered classrooms; teacher quality, retention, and effectiveness; and the use of video resources. You can download these publications for free at www.nea.org/research/bestpractices or purchase bound copies from the NEA Professional Library by calling (800) 229-4200.

Free Abduction Prevention Kits

Under a grant from Congress, GoodKnight.org is distributing free character development/abduction prevention educator kits in the hope of protecting children from individuals who wish to prey upon them. This bilingual kit contains all the materials necessary to teach students the deceptions that are used to lure children into gangs, drugs, or abduction. The award-winning kit is free while supplies last (with a fee for shipping and handling). The program has received the President's Service Award Silver Medal for Public Safety and has been featured in *Parade Magazine*, *America's Most Wanted*, and *48 Hours*. Visit www.goodknight.org or call (301) 595-8989.



Great Public Schools for Every Child

RESOURCES FOR GLBT HISTORY MONTH

NEA believes that a great public school is a fundamental right of *every* child. For a school to be great, it must be free from intimidation and harassment.

During Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender History Month and throughout the year, these free NEA resources will be useful to educators and parents working together to create schools where all children can learn and thrive.

STRENGTHENING THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

A guide for Association members and staff who may confront issues involving gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (GLBT) students or colleagues. Go to **www.nea.org/takenote/glbtguide06.html**.

FOCUS ON GAYS, LESBIANS, BISEXUALS, AND TRANSGENDERED PERSONS

A brochure that examines our understanding of the achievement gaps for this vulnerable population. Available at **www.nea.org/teachexperience/achievgapfocus0405.html**.

SAFE SCHOOLS FOR EVERYONE

An interview with Kevin Jennings, founder of the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network. Go to **www.nea.org/neatodayextra/safeschools.html**.

THE SAFE ZONE

A page with links to bullying resources, a brief glossary of bias terms, and a downloadable poster. Go to **www.nea.org/schoolsafety/safezone.html**.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

Celebrate Teen Read Week

A yearly effort by the American Library Association and its fastest-growing division, the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), Teen Read Week encourages teens to read just for the fun of it. This year's event runs **October 15–21.**

Olympic figure skater Kimmie Meissner and Major League Soccer stars Kevin Hartman and Chris Armas are promoting the event and this year's theme, "Get Active @ Your Library" to get teens to use the resources at their library to lead an active life.

Throughout the week, library events nationwide will encourage teens to explore the world of nonfiction books—such as biographies, self-help books, strange-but-true stories, and more. Teens also can vote for their favorite books. Visit www.ala.org/teenread to register for free.

History From People Who Lived It

The African-American struggle for freedom and justice is brought alive through the interactive unit, *Integrating with All Deliberate Speed*. This comprehensive unit on the Civil Rights Movement features videotaped interviews with legendary civil rights leaders describing their central involvement in the major events of the struggle.

Developed for middle and high school teachers by the National Visionary Leadership Project (NVLP), the three standards-based lesson plans are available free online. In addition to video history interviews, the lesson plans feature primary source photographs, speeches, and historical documents.

Students are taken behind the scenes through first-person accounts by historic figures, including Coretta Scott King, James Meredith, Andy Young, Dorothy Height, Bob Moses, and Constance Baker Motley. Through their stories, students gain rare access to the private realities behind public, historic events such as the 1963 March on Washington; the violent confrontation known as "Bloody Sunday" in Selma, Alabama; the 1964 Freedom Summer voting rights campaign; the *Brown v. Board of Education* legal battle; and much more. Visit www.visionaryproject.org to access the materials.

Would You Like To Do Association Work?

As part of its ongoing commitment to state and local affiliates, NEA is seeking potential eligible candidates for the 2007 UniServ Intern Program. Individuals who successfully complete the four-and-one-half-week training program and a three-month field experience will be certified as eligible for UniServ staff work in an NEA state or local affiliate. All individuals must be committed to moving for the three-month field experience. Eligible candidates must:

- BE A FEMALE OR ETHNIC MINORITY as designated by the U.S. census.
- BE AN ACTIVE NEA MEMBER for at least one year.
- HAVE BASIC KNOWLEDGE and understanding of the Association at the local/state level.
- BE COMMITTED TO PURSUING UniServ staff employment upon successful completion of the Intern Program.
- HAVE EXCELLENT interpersonal skills.
- BE WILLING TO PARTICIPATE in intensive training.
- BE WILLING TO RESIGN all Association offices at the local, state, and national level.
- BE WILLING TO WORK in a learning environment during day and evening hours, and learn new skills and attitudes.

Interested individuals should send a letter of interest to Brenda Vincent, UniServ Intern Program, NEA State Affiliate Relations and Training and Organization Development Unit, 1201 16th St., N.W, Washington, DC, 20036.

All letters of interest must be received by **December 8, 2006,** by U.S. mail or Federal Express. Faxed copies will not be accepted, nor will letters received after the deadline. You will then receive an application packet, which must be completed and returned by **January 31, 2007**.

Questions? Call Brenda Vincent at (202) 822-7175.

Note: NEA does not guarantee employment. Decisions about employment rest with state and local affiliates.

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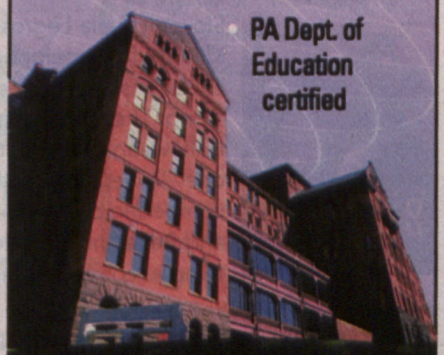

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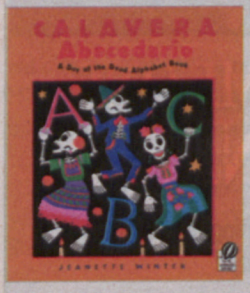
In Print

WHO IS THAT MASKED MAN?

Forget goblins and ghosts. This Halloween, Kimin—a young Korean-American boy—is going to dress up as his grandfather. His friends tell him that an old man costume is not scary, but they don't know that Kimin's grandfather was a Korean mask dancer. Kimin honors his culture and remembers his deceased grandfather in author Yangsook Choi's ***Behind the Mask***, a gentle tale combining American and Korean folk traditions. Ages 4–8. 40 pp. $16 from Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Go to www.fsgkidsbooks.com to order.

A FIESTA FOR SKELETONS



Calavera Abecedario from Jeanette Winter introduces young readers to Spanish vocabulary, the alphabet, and the art of making calaveras—the papier-mâché skeletons used in Mexico's el Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) celebrations. Each letter depicts a different colorful calavera and its name in Spanish, such as the frizzy-haired químico (chemist) or the lasso-wielding vaquero (cowboy). A glossary in the back provides English translations. Ages 3–7. 48 pp. $6 from Voyager Books/Harcourt. To order, go to www.harcourtbooks.com.

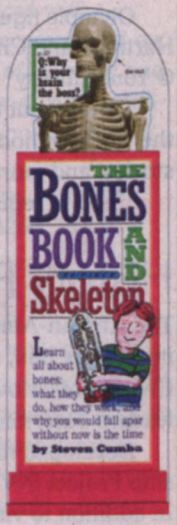
A HALLOWEEN LOVE STORY

Slovenly Bella Legrossi and neatnik Boris Kleanitoff are neighbors, but their differences ensure that they do not get along. They each plan to throw a Halloween party, inviting everyone—except each other. But when a competing party ruins their fêtes, Boris and Bella find they do have something in common. Can opposites attract? Find out in Carolyn Crimi's humorous ***Boris and Bella***. Ages 4–7. 32 pp. $6 from Voyager Books/Harcourt. Go to www.harcourtbooks.com.

MONSTERS HAVE PROBLEMS, TOO

Although this book claims to be for ages 5 to 10, adults will find themselves snickering their way through ***Frankenstein Makes a Sandwich*** by Adam Rex. Modern (and hilarious) poems on well-known monsters and their surprisingly un-scary problems, such as "Count Dracula Doesn't Know He's Been Walking Around All Night with Spinach in His Teeth," fill the pages of this collection with illustration styles that pay homage to James Audubon, Charles Schultz, and others. 40 pp. $16 from Harcourt Children's Books. To order, go to www.harcourtbooks.com.

THE THIGH BONE'S CONNECTED TO WHAT?

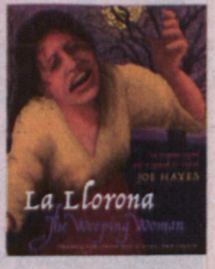


Here's a great tool to help kids learn about their skeletal structure. Like a 3-D puzzle, the 12-inch, 24-piece model skeleton is realistically designed with moving joints, each piece teaching the building blocks of the human form. Assembled, the skeleton can be displayed in its clear plastic bell jar. ***The Bones Book***, written by archaeologist and vertebrate paleontologist Stephen Cumbaa, accompanies the model and is packed with projects and experiments to test reflexes and senses. Ages 8–12. 64 pp. $16.95 from Workman Publishing. Go to www.workman.com

TOGETHER AGAIN, ONCE A YEAR

High in the Andes, Felipa misses her grandmother, who has just died. Felipa's mother says that Abuelita's soul lives on, so Felipa searches for her everywhere—even in the mountains. In the dark, her father finds her and explains that Abuelita's soul will return, along with all of the village's dearly departed, on the Day of the Dead. Felipa can hardly wait. She helps prepare the special foods and decorations for the day when everyone will be reunited. ***Felipa and the Day of the Dead*** by Birte Müller is a gentle introduction to an ancient tradition. PreK–2. 29 pp. $15.95 from North-South Books. Go to www.northsouth.com.

TIME TO GO IN



If you know children who complain about being home before dark, let them read this retelling of an old Hispanic legend. ***La Llorona: The Weeping Woman*** is the story of a ghost who cries and searches nightly for her lost children—and perhaps children to replace them! Storyteller Joe Hayes presents the chilling tale in English and Spanish, and discusses the oral tradition of storytelling and the longevity of folk and cautionary tales. Eerie illustrations help bring this 20th anniversary edition to life. Ages 9+. 32 pp. $16.95 from Cinco Puntos Press. Go to www.cincopuntos.com.

PHOTO: STOCK.XCHNGE

EDUCATION MARKET

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www.teachingtolerance.org/nearhinos

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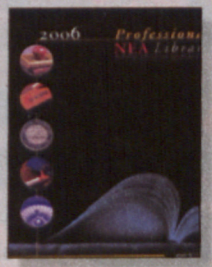

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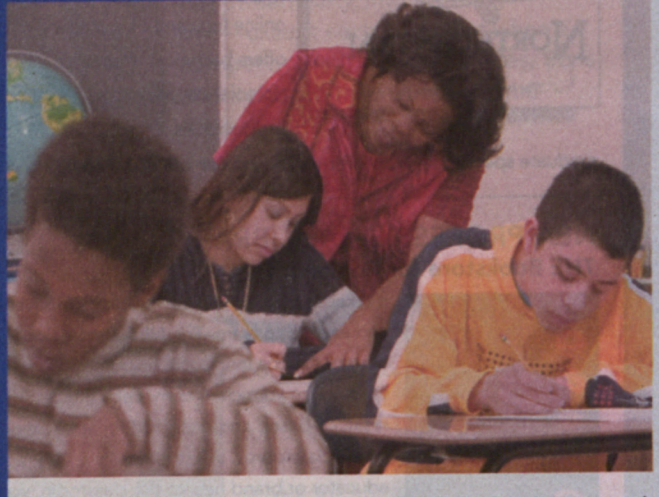
Jackson State University, MS
Harris-Stowe State University, MO
Tennessee State University, TN
Johnson C. Smith University, NC
Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, PA

NEA & The Tom Joyner Foundation



Tom Joyner Foundation & The National Education Association:

Moving Teachers Toward Full Licensure!

The Foundation and the National Education Association believe that pre-K through 12 curriculum should be taught by licensed teachers. We recognize that in certain urban, suburban, and rural communities not every teacher is licensed. In an effort to help teachers become fully licensed, the Foundation and NEA agreed to join forces to assist teachers who desire to gain full licensure. The unprecedented program is designed to increase the number of fully-certified minority teachers around the country to strengthen America's teaching force.

During the 2005-2006 school year, the Foundation provided financial assistance and NEA provided technical assistance and expertise to nearly 300 teachers in seven states supporting their participation in coursework and workshops. The program also paid for materials and individual tutoring to help teachers prepare for state licensure examinations.

Today, the partnership is looking to increase the number of participating Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and expand the program to help more teachers obtain full licensure.

Stay tuned for updated information via the *NEA Today* and the NEA website www.nea.org.

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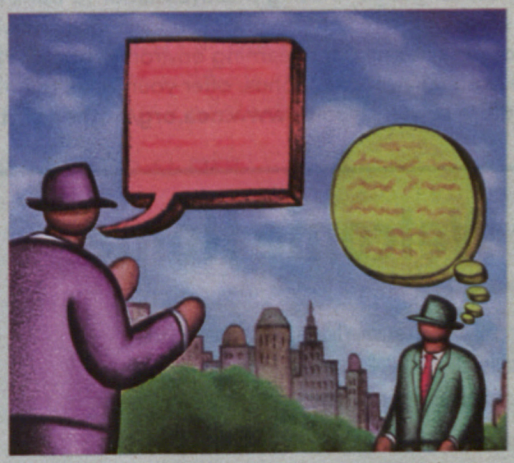
www.nea.org/joyner

Heads Up from NEA Member Benefits

YOUR 403(B) RETIREMENT PLAN COULD BE IN JEOPARDY!

YOU'VE SPENT YEARS contributing to your supplemental 403(b) retirement savings plan. Now, because of proposed changes to IRS 403(b) regulations, your choice of retirement 403(b)/Tax-Sheltered Account (TSA) providers could change. The proposed changes may result in some school districts reducing the number of TSA providers from which you can choose. Fewer choices mean you may be forced to select a different TSA provider.

What can you do? In order to maintain the relationship with your current TSA provider, be proactive and contact your NEA UniServ staff and local education Association. Together you can work with your school district officials to help ensure that your current retirement savings choice remains an option in your district.



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You're Invited...

To join the biggest reading celebration in the nation! On March 2, 2007, NEA's Read Across America will mark its 10th anniversary in style with reading parties to benefit school libraries in need and to share the joys of reading with students.

Would you like to let us know about your Read Across America plans and organizing tips? We want to hear from you. Go to www.nea.org/readacross and share your story. While you're there, check out our resources. In addition to our event planning tool kit, you'll find materials to help kids keep reading front and center all year long.

And don't forget to involve your students. NEA and Youth Service America are offering $500 Youth Leaders for Literacy Grants for student-led literacy projects. The application and guidelines are at www.nea.org/readacross/volunteer/. The application deadline is November 24.

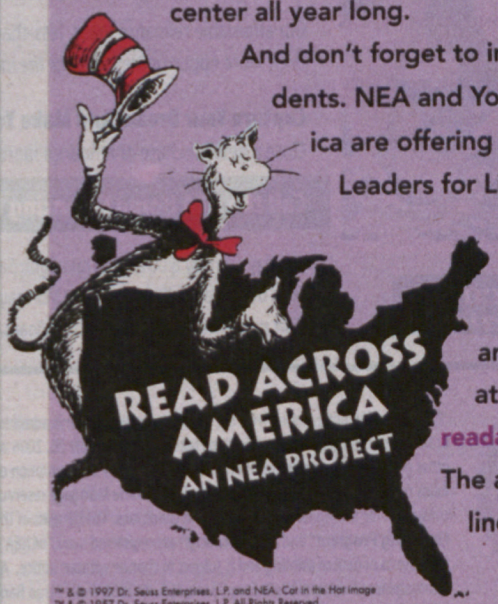

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ILLUSTRATION: GETTY IMAGES

On the Web

BOOKPLATE HEAVEN

Few pleasures can equal that of pasting a well-designed bookplate in the covers of a cherished book. British author and previous Children's Laureate Anne Fine has created a Web site with beautiful bookplates designed by artists and illustrators that can be downloaded for free. Although most will appeal to elementary and middle school students, there are choices for young adults. Visit **www.myhomelibrary.org/.**

MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS NEED GOOGLE NO MORE

No more criss-crossing the Web and making do with materials developed for other grades. Kean University has gathered a list of over 400 premium, hand-picked links to rich content exclusively for middle school educators on diverse topics including the arts, mathematics, science, social studies, language arts, and more, plus advisory, guidance, career, counseling, and professional development resources. Go to **http://131.125.2.61/~njcms/educationalhotlinks/index.php.**

HELP STUDENTS PREPARE FOR COLLEGE MATH

Many students enter college without realizing the level of preparation required to succeed in math and science. The University of Utah has launched RUReady.net—a learning and self-assessment tool to help pre-college students gauge and improve their readiness to take college introductory math, such as calculus and intermediate algebra. It offers free access to tests and learning tools that analyze responses and provide feedback on error patterns. Any student at any level of ability can use these resources free of charge. Go to **http://ruready.net.**

DO THE RIGHT THING

Every generation bemoans the rude behavior of young people. What's an educator to do? Check out NEA's new Web area designed to promote thoughtful, respectful behavior. You'll find ideas that educators are using today—from teaching appropriate language to using positive humor to training kids how to solve problems on the playground. Educators who teach social skills make the learning environment more pleasant and productive for all. Bonus: offer your ideas to help shape future content! Go to **www.nea.org/dotherightthing.**

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EQUAL HOUSING LENDER

DIVERSITY CALENDAR

OCTOBER

OCTOBER—CZECH HERITAGE MONTH
Na zdraví! Celebrate the culture of Americans of Czech descent by downloading the Homelands Gallery Guide, a primer on Czech history and culture, at the National Czech & Slovak Museum and Library, www.ncsml.org/exhibits/current/exhibits-permanent.htm.

OCTOBER—POLISH AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH
This month honors the many accomplishments of Polish Americans. The Library of Congress has information about the history of Poles in America, beginning with the Revolutionary War, at http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/immig/alt/polish4.html.

OCTOBER 2—YOM KIPPUR
The most solemn day of the Jewish year, and one of the most important, the "Day of Atonement" is typically spent at synagogue in fasting, reflection, and prayer.

OCTOBER 2—MAHATMA GANDHI'S BIRTHDAY
Born in 1869, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, India's legendary leader sought truth, practiced non-violent resistance, and led his country to independence from British rule. He was assassinated in 1948.

OCTOBER 20—BIRTH OF THE BÁB
Celebrated by millions worldwide, this day marks the birth in 1819 of Ali Muhammad, a prophet and founder of the Bahá'í faith. Go to www.bahai.org for more information.

OCTOBER 24—EID-AL-FITR
Translated as "festival of breaking the fast," this Muslim day of feasting and celebration marks the end of Ramadan, a month-long period of fasting and reflection. Presents are given, new clothes are worn, and special foods are served.

NOVEMBER

NOVEMBER—AMERICAN INDIAN HERITAGE MONTH
This month observes the contributions and unique heritage of our nation's first inhabitants. Visit the National Museum of the American Indian site for teaching guides and posters at www.nmai.su.edu/subpage.cfm?subpage=education&second=pub#thank. And check out our Native American booklist at www.nea.org/readacross/resources/nabooklist.html.

NOVEMBER 5—GUY FAWKES DAY
Remember, remember the 5th of November! Still celebrated in England with fireworks and bonfires, this popular holiday recalls the foiling of a 1605 plot to blow up Parliament.

NOVEMBER 12–18—AMERICAN EDUCATION WEEK
This year's theme is *Great Public Schools: A Basic Right and Our Responsibility.* For more information and downloadable art, visit www.nea.org/aew.

NOVEMBER 13–19—CHILDREN'S BOOK WEEK
Observed since 1919, this event celebrates children's experience of the written word. This year's theme: *More Books, Please!* For information, go to www.cbcbooks.org/cbw.

NOVEMBER 23—THANKSGIVING
Always celebrated on the fourth Thursday in November, this American harvest holiday is marked by feasting and giving thanks. *The Christian Science Monitor* has an in-depth article about the first Thanksgiving in 1621, including a look at what was probably on the menu. Go to www.csmonitor.com/2002/1127/p13s02-lign.html.

Diversity Recipe

NAN BERENJI
Persian poppy seed cookies

Some culinary historians believe that the forerunner of today's cookie originated in 7th century Persia, one of the earliest countries to cultivate cane sugar.

Just in time for *Eid al-Fitr* (eed-all-FEE-ter) is this recipe for delicately flavored shortbread cookies infused with rose water and poppy seeds. You'll need rice flour (look in the natural foods section of your grocery), food-grade rose water (available in Middle Eastern groceries and gourmet food shops), and a spice called cardamom. Makes 3 dozen cookies.

Ingredients
2 sticks unsalted butter
2 cups confectioner's sugar
2 eggs
1/2 tsp. cardamom
2 Tbsp. rose water (food-grade)*
2-1/4 cups rice flour
1/4 cup poppy seeds

Cream the butter and sugar. Add the eggs, beating until smooth. Stir in the cardamom and rose water. Add the rice flour one quarter cup at a time, beating until the mixture is smooth. Form the dough into a ball, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate overnight.

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Roll small balls of dough between your hands—about the size of a cherry tomato—and press onto a greased baking sheet. Sprinkle with poppy seeds.

Bake 10 minutes until the cookies are firm but still white (do not let them brown). Let the cookies rest for several minutes before removing them to a rack. Store in an airtight container.

**Can't find rose water? Substitute two teaspoons of lemon or orange extract plus enough water to equal two tablespoons of liquid, total.*

On TV

EYE OF THE LEOPARD

PBS, October 8, 9 p.m. ET/PT. Check local listings.
Three years of filming a single leopard in the wild—from cubhood through young adulthood—is distilled into two exciting hours by husband and wife filmmaking team Dereck and Beverly Joubert. "Legadema" was constantly under threat, but survived with the help of her attentive mother. Information is available at www.nationalgeographic.com/tv/index.html.

MODERN AFRICAN ART AND ARTISANS

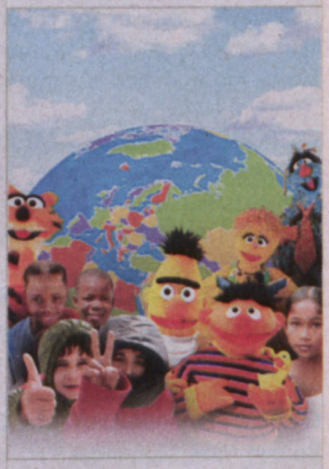
Discovery Channel, October 12, 5 a.m., ET/PT.
This show looks at modern-day African artisans and their work, culture, and legacy. Can be taped and used in the classroom for one year. Teaching materials are at www.discoveryschool.com.

THANKSGIVING SPECIAL: THE SECRET LIFE OF THANKSGIVING

Food Channel, October 14 & 28, 4:30 a.m. ET/1:30 a.m. PT.
From a traditional spread in Plymouth, Massachusetts, to a deep-fried turkey in New Orleans, this two-part program travels to various U.S. cities exploring local Thanksgiving cuisine and the history behind it. Tape and use in the classroom for one year. Teaching materials are at www.foodtv.com/classroom.

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO SESAME STREET

PBS, October 24, 9 p.m. ET/PT. Check local listings.



The children's show is familiar to every student in America, but Sesame Street has gone global in a big way. This documentary follows members of the United States-based Sesame Workshop as they attempt to get the show on the air for children in Kosovo, Bangladesh, and South Africa. The "Sesame process" involves showing children playing on their own "street," relating to their own language and customs. But in some places, just getting the creative team to work together is a challenge. Go to www.pbs.org/independentlens.

On TV listings are provided by KIDSNET, a national resource for children's media in Washington, D.C., www.kidsnet.org, and by Cable in the Classroom's Access Learning *magazine at www.ciconline.org.*

BOOKS BY NEA MEMBERS

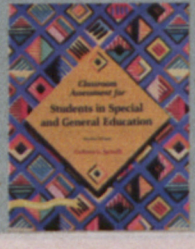
SALAAM, A MUSLIM AMERICAN BOY'S STORY

By Tricia Brown
Imran, a real child, introduces himself and his life in America. We meet family, friends, relatives, and his dog, Tasha. Imran loves birthday parties, takes karate lessons, and dreams of being a rock star, things that make him just like any other boy—except for his faith. Imran explains that Islam teaches him to be kind and respectful. He hopes that others will get to know him and treat him and his family with respect and courtesy. Ages 7–10. 30 pp. $17.95 from Henry Holt and Company.

Visit www.henryholtchildrensbooks.com for more information.

CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT FOR STUDENTS IN SPECIAL AND GENERAL EDUCATION (SECOND EDITION)

By Cathleen Spinelli
Many questions surround the testing of special education students. Classroom veterans and new teachers alike will appreciate this practical and in-depth exploration of the assessment maze, revised with the latest in authentic curriculum and performance-based assessment measures with direct connections to instruction, IEP development, and reporting to parents. 551 pages. $76 from Prentice Hall.



Visit the companion Web site at www.prenhall.com/spinelli.

MOM FOR MAYOR

By Nancy Edwards
Fifth-grader Eric Clark is outraged over the town's plan to sell the park—*his park*—to developers, so he hatches a plot: His mom will run for mayor! On his own, he organizes a campaign to get her name on the ballot, taking everyone—including his mother—by surprise. Eric finds that a political campaign, like anything worthwhile, requires work and perseverance. He also learns about the strength of friendship and family ties and the value of the democratic process. A heartfelt and enjoyable read. Ages 9–11. 133 pp. $15.95 from Cricket Books. Visit www.cricketmag.com.

WHAT DO YOU STAND FOR? FOR KIDS, A GUIDE TO BUILDING CHARACTER

By Barbara Lewis
What do you see when you look inside? The author challenges readers to consider their strengths and weaknesses and improve upon both. Addressing character—why it matters, how one develops it—she focuses on desirable traits, including forgiveness, caring, fairness, and honesty. Quizzes, activities, "what if?" scenarios, true stories, and reproducible pages offer readers many ways to think about who they want to be. Ages 9–12. 165 pp. $14.95 from Free Spirit Publishing. Go to www.freespirit.com.

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The NEA MemberCare® Medicare Supplement Insurance Program helps fill the hospital and medical gaps left by Medicare and provides additional discounts not offered by other plans. Why settle for less coverage from another provider when you can have better coverage at about the same cost? For more information, call 1-800-637-4636, Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. (or Saturday, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.) ET.

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Custodial Duties

A former social worker tries pushing a broom and discovers the educational role of the clean-up crew.

BY JOHN ELLISON

I'm a retired clinical social worker with about 30 years of professional experience. Last April, after a year in retirement, I got restless and began looking for a job. I saw a sign advertising school custodial positions, applied, and got hired. The starting pay was $9.46 an hour.

Four days a week, I worked from 3 to 11:30 p.m., and on Wednesdays I worked 1 to 9:30 p.m. We were the night crew. Each evening, we cleaned the hallways, classrooms, bathrooms, locker rooms, offices, gymnasium, and weight room, and hauled out several hundred pounds of trash, hoisting it into dumpsters behind the school. The work was physically demanding and a challenge to complete in the time allotted. Within a month, I had lost 10 pounds.

I came to appreciate the good job my three female colleagues did. I often wondered how they could continue at such physically difficult jobs with evening hours and so little pay. I came to understand that they took a great deal of pride in leaving the building "glistening clean" each evening. Teachers and administrators complimented us on the condition of the building and classrooms. For the first time in my life, I discovered a deep appreciation and respect for the integral role custodians play in the physical maintenance of schools and their contribution to educating students.

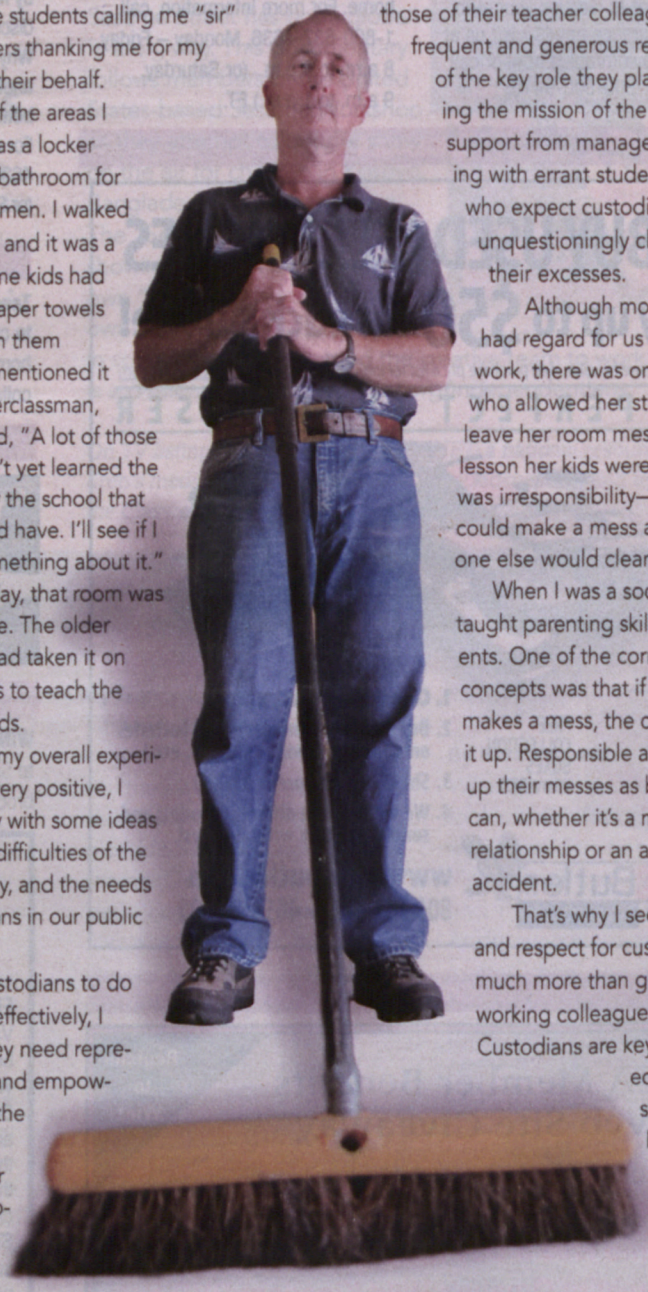
"RESPONSIBLE ADULTS clean up their messes as best they can, whether it's a mess of a relationship or an auto accident."

During my six weeks there, I observed no deliberate destruction of school property and an overall respect for the building and the custodial staff. Since I had not done this kind of work for over 30 years, I wondered how I would be treated. It was a relief to experience students calling me "sir" and teachers thanking me for my efforts on their behalf.

One of the areas I cleaned was a locker room and bathroom for underclassmen. I walked in one day and it was a mess—some kids had unrolled paper towels and thrown them around. I mentioned it to an upperclassman, and he said, "A lot of those kids haven't yet learned the respect for the school that they should have. I'll see if I can do something about it." The next day, that room was immaculate. The older students had taken it on themselves to teach the younger kids.

While my overall experience was very positive, I came away with some ideas about the difficulties of the job, the pay, and the needs of custodians in our public schools.

For custodians to do their jobs effectively, I believe they need representation and empowerment in the following areas: clear job descriptions, a clear chain of command so they are not pulled away from their duties by the demands of individuals who are not authorized to assign work to them, a living and reasonable wage, benefits equal to those of their teacher colleagues, frequent and generous recognition of the key role they play in achieving the mission of the school, and support from managers in dealing with errant students and staff who expect custodians to unquestioningly clean up after their excesses.



John Ellison says teaching respect for custodians builds character.

Although most people had regard for us and our work, there was one teacher who allowed her students to leave her room messy. The lesson her kids were learning was irresponsibility—that they could make a mess and someone else would clean it up.

When I was a social worker, I taught parenting skills to parents. One of the cornerstone concepts was that if a child makes a mess, the child cleans it up. Responsible adults clean up their messes as best they can, whether it's a mess of a relationship or an auto accident.

That's why I see support and respect for custodians as much more than giving hard-working colleagues their due. Custodians are key players in educating students to become productive and responsible adult members of society.

Before his six-week stint as a Colorado school custodian, **John Ellison** worked as a clinical social worker in a state hospital, clinics, and private practice.

PHOTO: RICK GIASE

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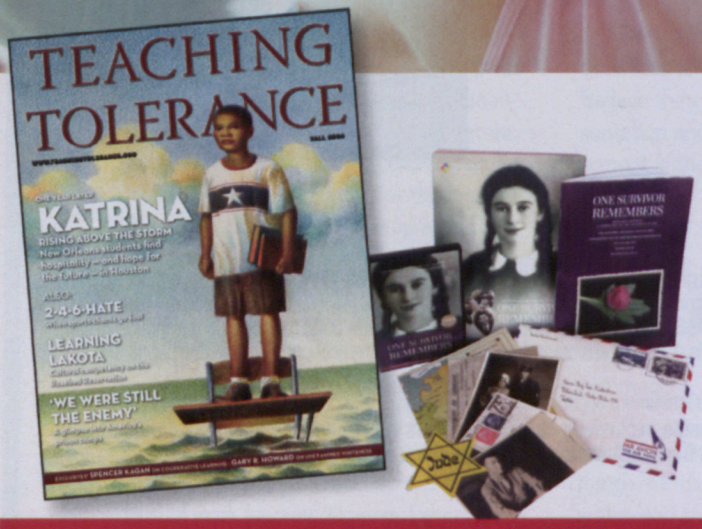

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